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# Influence without Leverage?

## Anglo-American Relations and Intervention Post-9/11: the cases of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the evolution of Anglo-American relations in Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa (CA+MENA) region following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks from the perspective of the UK, the junior partner within the alliance. Building upon the work of Suzanne Nossel and Joseph Nye, this thesis develops the idea of *smart power* to understand how the UK has influenced US decision-making across four case studies of Anglo-American military intervention: Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Moreover, it also incorporates the role of personality in the exercise of smart power, an element that has largely been overlooked in the literature to date.

This thesis aims to answer the following core research question: *how did the UK influence US intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria between 2001-2013?* Proceeding from the hypothesis that the US-UK alliance has evolved post-9/11 with the UK projecting greater influence over US policy, this study gathers and analyses qualitative data, comprising 29 semi-structured interviews with British and American political elites, and over 120 primary source documents, including 55 political speeches and official statements, in developing its argument.

The principal aim of this thesis is to reconceptualise and reinterpret the US-UK special relationship from a British perspective by using the framework of smart power to understand how the UK has influenced US foreign policy behaviour in Central Asia and the Middle East and North Africa post-9/11. Moreover, this analysis contributes to the literature on Anglo-American relations and the study of power by providing a more nuanced understanding of the alliance that is more than just about the exercise of hard power, but emphasises the importance of the relations between leaders and their individual national role conceptions in the endurance of the alliance.

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## List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AAR | Anglo-American relations |
| AIOC | Anglo-Iranian Oil Company |
| ARAMCO | Arabian American Oil Company |
| CA | Central Asia |
| CA+MENA | Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa |
| CASOC | California Arabian Standard Oil Company |
| CENTCOM | United States Central Command |
| CIA | Central Intelligence Agency |
| COIN | Counterinsurgency |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease 2019 |
| CPA | Coalition Provisional Authority |
| CTC | Counter-Terrorism Committee (UNSC) |
| CW | Chemical weapons |
| DOP | Defence and Overseas Policy (UK Ministerial Committee) |
| DfiD | Department for International Development |
| FCO | Foreign and Commonwealth Office |
| FDR | Franklin D. Roosevelt (32nd US President) |
| FSA | Federation of South Arabia |
| FSA | Free Syrian Army |
| GWOT | Global war on terror |
| IAEA | International Atomic Energy Agency |
| ISAF | International Security Assistance Force |
| ISIL | Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant |
| JIC | Joint Intelligence Committee |
| JFK | John F. Kennedy (35th US President) |
| MENA | Middle East and North Africa |
| MEPP | Middle East Peace Process |
| MI6 | Military Intelligence, Section Six (UK) also known as SIS |

| | |
|---|---|
| MOD | Ministry of Defence |
| NAC | North Atlantic Council |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation |
| NFZ | No-fly zone |
| NRC | National role conception |
| NSC | National Security Council |
| NSS | National Security Strategy |
| NTC | National Transitional Council |
| OEF | Operation Enduring Freedom |
| OIF | Operation Iraqi Freedom |
| ORHA | Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance |
| OUP | Operation Unified Protector |
| PNAC | Project for the New American Century |
| R2P | Responsibility to Protect |
| SDR | Strategic Defence Review |
| SIS | Secret Intelligence Service (UK) |
| SNC | Syrian National Council |
| SOHR | Syrian Observatory for Human Rights |
| TNC | Transitional National Council |
| UAR | United Arab Republic |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNMOVIC | United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission |
| UNSC | United Nations Security Council |
| UNSCOP | United Nations Special Committee on Palestine |
| UNSCR | United Nations Security Council Resolution |
| US | United States |
| WMD | Weapons of mass destruction |
| YAR | Yemen Arab Republic |

## Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work. Material from the published or unpublished work of others which is used in the thesis is credited to the author in question in the text.

## Note on Elite Interviewing

One major aspect of the fieldwork was elite interviewing of British and American officials who were involved in US-UK relations post-9/11. All individuals who were interviewed have signed consent forms (see appendix for a sample) stating that their quotes may be used and attributed to them in this thesis. Those who did not wish to be attributed have remained anonymous, and their interview details (i.e. location and date) have been concealed to protect the participants' anonymity.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

*"I tell you that we must steer close to America. If we don't, we will lose our influence to shape what they do."* (Tony Blair, March 2002)[1]

The Anglo-American relationship has been one of the most important alliances in international relations since the end of the Second World War, and continues to remain hugely critical in the international political system. However, the 'special' relationship has undergone significant changes post-9/11 with the emergence of new security challenges such as global terrorism, in which the UK was the US' chief ally in the so-called 'war on terror', and regional insecurity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) following the Arab Uprisings.

This thesis examines the evolution of Anglo-American relations (AAR) in Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks from the perspective of the UK, the junior partner within the alliance. It aims to answer the following core research question: *how did the UK influence US intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria between 2001-2013?* Building upon the work of Suzanne Nossel and Joseph Nye, this thesis develops the idea of smart power to understand how the UK has influenced US decision-making across four case studies of Anglo-American military intervention: Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Moreover, it also incorporates the role of personality in the exercise of smart power, an element that has largely been overlooked in the literature to date.

Proceeding from the hypothesis that the US-UK alliance has evolved post-9/11 with the UK projecting greater influence over US policy in Central Asia, the Middle East

[1] In his memoir, *The Point of Departure*, Former UK Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook (2003, p.116), reflected how Blair instructed his Cabinet to remain close to the Americans prior to joining the US-led campaign in Iraq in March 2003 as a means to maintain British influence in Washington.

and North Africa (CA + MENA), this study gathers and analyses qualitative data, comprising 29 semi-structured interviews with British and American political elites, and over 120 primary source documents, including 55 political speeches and official statements, in developing its argument. The principal aim of this thesis is to reconceptualise and to reinterpret the US-UK special relationship from a British perspective by using the concept of smart power to understand how the UK has influenced US foreign policy behaviour in CA + MENA post-9/11.

## 1.1 The study of Anglo-American relations

Since the end of the Second World War, the 'special relationship' between the United States and the United Kingdom has ebbed and flowed. The term 'special relationship', first coined in British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' speech of 1946 (Dumbrell, 2001, p.7), has been used to describe the unique nature of the alliance between the US and the UK, emphasising both countries' shared language, history and values (Dumbrell, 2009, p.65). Defining the special relationship has been a subject of debate amongst scholars, in particular, much of the literature has sought to define and to interrogate the notion of Anglo-American 'specialness' using two different schools of thought: specialness derived from sentiment and from national interests. The former sees "shared values, culture, democratic principles and kinship" as the source of the Anglo-American special relationship (Dobson and Marsh, 2013, p.3), whilst the latter emphasises mutual interests forming a functional relationship that remains special as long as each side remains important to the other (ibid.).

Alex Danchev, whose work on special alliances led him to devise a criterion of ten defining characteristics to define 'specialness'[2], organised these debates into three

[2] Danchev's ten key characteristics are: transparency, informality, generality, reciprocity, exclusivity, clandestinity, reliability, durability, potentiality and mythicisability (1998, p.1). Danchev's analysis, however, does not offer any

approaches: Evangelical, Functionalist and the Terminalist (2006, p.579-95). The 'Evangelical' approach argues that the US-UK special relationship is based on shared cultural and political philosophies. For scholars like H.C. Allen, the alliance is more to do with sentiment than power politics: "The intimacy of Anglo-American relations is by no means solely dependent upon the powerful but sometimes fickle bond of emotion…" (1954, pp. 17-18). Similarly, H.G. Nicholas argued that "a shared language and a common historical inheritance of 'Anglo-Saxon' polity led, not just to a mutual understanding of international politics, but a "common cast of mind, parallel styles of action and reaction at both the popular and higher levels of government" (1975, p.1).

By contrast, scholars like John Dumbrell, John Baylis, Nigel Ashton, C.J. Bartlett and Ian Clark emphasised the purpose and functions of the Anglo-American alliance. Among these 'Functionalist' scholars, David Reynolds has argued that the origins of the special relationship "grew out of a sense of shared threat and mutual need" (1986, p.39). This interpretation of the alliance draws on a more realist understanding of the politics of alliance formation, and asserts that the Anglo-American relationship is driven by national interests rather than shared values and culture. According to this 'Functionalist' approach, intelligence sharing, alongside nuclear and defence cooperation lie at the heart of the alliance and are maintained as they meet the mutual security needs of each state.

Relatedly, 'Terminalist' scholars, such as the late Michael Howard and John Dickie, argued that mutual security concerns have explained the uniqueness of the US-UK special relationship although they reasoned that the alliance began to lose its relevance and 'specialness' by the end of the Cold War when there was no longer an obvious enemy uniting both states' grand strategies (Louis and Bull, 1986, p.387; Dickie, 1994, p.1-10).

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clarification around meanings, nor does he clarify how these qualities should be applied to qualify a 'special' relationship.

Howard's and Dickie's assertion that Anglo-American relations were dwindling, however, has not held up to realities of the post-9/11 world in which the relationship between London and Washington was given a new lease of life; something this thesis will explore in greater detail.

When considering the basis for the US-UK special relationship, and as Dobson and Marsh have argued (2013, p.15), it would be a mistake to juxtapose interests and sentiment in a way that treats them as distinct and unrelated to one another. The alliance is defined by a "mutually and self-reinforcing dynamic" whereby mutual interests are often formed because of common sentiments (ibid). As Dobson and Marsh noted, a main reason why the alliance has endured for so long has been the mutual support of "shared interests and sentiments covering feelings of overlapping identity, friendship, and moral and political values, cooperation in economic, defence, nuclear, and intelligence relations…" (ibid., pp.15-16). As such, this thesis does not situate itself in strictly one school of thought, in either the Evangelical or Functionalist, but recognises the role of both sentiment and interests in explaining the specialness of the Anglo-American alliance.

Nonetheless, since the start of the new century, the special relationship has faced new challenges with the emergence of non-traditional security threats. In academic and policy circles, there has been significant debate around how these new security challenges have impacted upon the Anglo-American alliance. For some, the special relationship has been subject to a steady transatlantic drift (Kagan, 2002; Cox, 2003; Daalder, 2003; Cox, 2005; Wallace and Phillips, 2009); and for sentimentalist scholars, as noted, the alliance's longevity has been explained by both countries' shared history and common language (Turner, 1971; Allen, 1985). For others the relationship remains an elusive British construct that has formed the cornerstone of UK defence policy since 1945 (Warner, 1989; Azubuike, 2006; Strachan, 2009; Wheatcroft, 2010); and a strategic relationship defined

by joint interests and shared cultural values (Kissinger, 1982; Kennedy, 2002; Dumbrell, 2009; Gibbins and Rostampour, 2019). Despite these differing viewpoints, scholars agree that AAR reached a crossroads following the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Dunn, 2008) and the Bush administration's subsequent pursuit of American exceptionalism in the Middle East (Kaye, 2004; Dunn, 2009; Gerges, 2013).

One interpretation of this critical moment within the relationship is that US foreign policy, which remained rooted in unilateralism and a 'preeminent security doctrine', placed primacy on the interests of the United States at the expense of its allies, including the UK (Kaye, 2004; Krahmann, 2005). Another interpretation is that major clashes emerged over how to counter the threat of global terrorism (Howard, 2002; Cox, 2005; Buzan, 2006). Still heavily affected by the emotional fall-out after 9/11, Bush's rhetorical construction of the 'war on terror' divided the West (Howard, 2002; Daalder, 2003; Cox, 2005) as it looked to confront a non-state actor, al-Qaeda, as well as states, such as Saddam Hussein's Iraq, deemed to present a threat to international security (Buzan, 2006). Despite reservations held by many in London, the UK joined the US-led coalition to "disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people" (The White House, 2003). It was the second largest contributor of troops to the 2003 invasion of Iraq having already committed itself to the conflict in Afghanistan. Even after "paying a substantial price in blood and treasure" in Iraq and Afghanistan, as Patrick Porter (2010) has described, some have speculated whether Britain managed to successfully influence the scope and direction of the Bush administration's strategy of democracy promotion and regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq (Bluth, 2004; Dumbrell, 2004; Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers, 2007; Ford, 2014).

In addition to the Bush administration's failure to ensure state stability across much of the Middle East following the invasion of Iraq, scholars have highlighted Barack

Obama's subsequent pivot away from Europe towards the Indo-Pacific, as a further explanation for the changing dynamics within the special relationship (Wallace and Phillips, 2009; Gerges, 2013; Dobson and Marsh, 2014; Dumani, 2016). William Wallace and Christopher Phillips (2009) have argued that Obama's stance of 'pragmatic indifference' indicated a return to the shared interests that defined the Anglo-American relationship for decades. Others have opined, however, that Obama's geopolitical pivot towards Asia highlighted two underlying issues within the alliance: America was becoming increasingly less Atlanticist in its foreign policy outlook (Cox, 2012; Dumani, 2016) and the US and UK were pursuing diverging strategic priorities (Kaye, 2004; Gibbins and Rostampour, 2019).

Throughout these shifts within the US-UK relationship, nevertheless, close ties have remained between the two countries' armed forces in defence technology, procurement and in particular, in the realm of intelligence ties through the Five Eyes alliance (Reynolds, 1985; Azubuike, 2006; Svendsen, 2009; Wallace and Phillips, 2009; Foerster and Raymond, 2017). Xu has argued that high levels of institutionalisation within the Anglo-American alliance has formed and maintained "habits of cooperation, solidified interdependence and consolidated mutual trust" between the US and UK "in their cooperation on intelligence, nuclear and military issues" (Xu, 2016, p.1228).

For instance, US-UK intelligence sharing was highlighted by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee in 2010 as a 'special' feature of the alliance, stating that "the field of intelligence cooperation is one of the areas where the UK-US relationship can be rightly described as 'special'" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2010, p.42). Similarly, the Mutual Defence Agreement of 1958, which permitted unparalleled cooperation on nuclear issues between both states, was renewed in 2014 for another decade (Norton-Taylor, 2014), and the 2015 Strategic Defence and

Security Review (SDSR) described the US-UK intelligence relationship as "unparalleled" (SDSR, 2015, p.51). Moreover, both states' collaboration on defence programmes, such as the Joint Strike Fighter initiative, illustrates the 'specialness' of the US-UK defence relationship (Oliver and Williams, 2017, p.6). In sum, the UK's relationship with the US has been regarded as the "keystone of British foreign policy" since the Second World War and a "core feature of Britain's national identity" (Dobson and Marsh, 2013, p.2).

While these debates on Anglo-American 'specialness' are useful to understand how the alliance has been previously conceptualised within the literature, ultimately this thesis is concerned with the UK's exercise of power and influence within the alliance. As such, this thesis examines the power dynamics between the US and the UK, and thus notes the various debates within the literature about the asymmetrical nature of the Anglo-American special relationship. Historically, scholars have emphasised the Britain's reliance and dependency on the 'special relationship' in comparison to America, portraying the UK as the junior and more dependent partner within the alliance (Bartlett, 1992, p.110). Reynolds argued that the UK's decline as a 'Great Power' from the 1960s and 1970s impacted America's perspective of the UK as a special ally and capable partner (1985, p.13). As such, the alliance appeared imbalanced, and was viewed as more important from London's perspective than Washington's. This disparity in the perception of the importance of the alliance is best captured by Dumbrell who noted that the 'special relationship' is "spoken of largely in British accents" (2009 p.65). The imbalance of superiority within the relationship is not purely historical, however. The dependence of Britian's nuclear deterrent upon the US, from whom the UK sources its nuclear missiles (Wallis-Simons, 2015), is a case in point.

This power imbalance within the Anglo-American alliance has meant that, at times throughout the relationship, the UK government has sought to maintain its close

partnership with the United States, by endeavouring to influence the preferences and policies of its stronger partner, as close cooperation between the two states has served British interests from the Second World War to the present day (Marsh and Baylis, 2006, p.174). As Dobson and Marsh argued, the special relationship has been “sentimental rhetoric” used by London to “have an edge with the world’s leading superpower” (2013, p.5). The merging of British ‘brains’ and the American ‘brawn’ was epitomised by former Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, who described Great Britain as the ‘Greece to America’s Rome’.

Wallace and Oliver (2005) noted that the UK has used its geographical and political location to act as the ‘bridge’ interpreting between the US and Europe while maintaining influence on each side, although the 2015 Brexit referendum has arguably diminished its unique position within the transatlantic relationship. During the war in Iraq in 2003, scholars viewed Britain as a counterweight to America’s hawkish foreign policy, and the only ‘critical friend’ potentially capable of taming US power (Walt, 2005). Scholars like Thomas Eason, however, argued that Tony Blair’s staunch support for America in Iraq illustrated British ‘poodleism’ and claimed that Blair’s subservience to Washington indicated the UK’s loss of influence and its inability to operate independently in foreign policy (2023, pp.1-3). The UK’s ability to tame, to steer and to influence US power for British interests in CA + MENA post-9/11 is the primary focus of this thesis. While it will explore the context of power more broadly, it takes a particular understanding of smart power and explores how the UK has used smart power to exercise influence in the region.

### 1.2 Contributions to existing scholarship

Considering these key debates on Anglo-American relations and the study of power, this thesis seeks to add to the body of knowledge on AAR in the following two ways. Firstly, it seeks to make a novel contribution to existing scholarship by examining how the UK, a Global Middle Power, has influenced the United States, a great power, within the context of a bilateral alliance. The current literature on AAR has largely been dominated by the study of an imbalanced power dynamic between the two countries, with the US positioned as the dominant power and the UK playing the role of the junior partner. While these more traditional analyses will be studied, additional research is needed to understand whether the UK has influenced US foreign policy post-9/11 and how it has exercised agency within the alliance to achieve its own national interests in the region. The findings from this research will be of interest to academics and policymakers concerned with the study of AAR, specifically bilateral relationships between global middle powers and great powers in international politics. Furthermore, this research will have a broader utility in contextualising how British political elites have managed to leverage influence with Washington to advance UK interests.

Secondly, this thesis applies the concept of smart power in an innovative way to provide a more nuanced understanding of Anglo-American relations post-9/11. Building upon the work of Suzanne Nossel and Joseph Nye, this thesis further develops the idea of smart power to understand how the UK has influenced US policy across four military interventions in CA + MENA. It also incorporates the role of personality in the exercise of smart power, an element that has largely been overlooked in the literature to date. Previously, historical and chronological approaches as well as theories of hard and soft power have been used to explain the power dynamics between London and Washington across the MENA, but they do not fully account for the changing dynamics of the special relationship as it relates to intervention in the region, specifically the role of personal

relations between leaders and individual decisionmakers' national role conceptions. Moreover, the term, smart power, has historically been used to frame US foreign policy when it was first adopted by the Obama presidency in response to the Bush administration's pursuit of unilateralism and application of military force in Afghanistan and Iraq. As such, drawing on original empirical research largely comprised of semi-structured interviews with key policy elites from both London and Washington, this thesis will use smart power as an analytical framework to reconceptualise and to reimagine the contours of the US-UK special relationship from a British perspective.

## 1.3 Methodology

### 1.31 Research Questions

This thesis will seek to address the following core research question: *how did the UK influence US intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria between 2001-2013?* Using smart power as a conceptual framework, this thesis also seeks to address the following sub-questions as they apply to each of the four case studies:

1. Was British intervention complementarian?
2. To what extent were regional contexts a factor in the UK's efforts to influence US intervention in CA + MENA post-9/11?
3. How did the UK utilise its perception of the 'special relationship' with the US to advance its interests in the CA + MENA?
4. What role did the politics of personal relations play in the exercise of British power within the alliance?

### 1.32 Research Design

To respond to these research questions, this thesis adopts a multiple case study approach to test the conception of smart power against four Anglo-American interventions

in Central Asia, Middle East, North Africa post-9/11: Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. This is a "naturalistic" research design in which the study will explore "an event…in depth and in its natural context" (Crowe et al., 2011, p.1). Defined as "an instance of class or events" (George and Bennett, 2005, p.17), the cases in this study are four Anglo-American security interventions in the MENA following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The regions of CA + MENA have been chosen as a region of focus because, outside of Europe, it is where the United States and Great Britain have cooperated and competed most clearly for influence. Moreover, no two powers have shaped the political and strategic contours of CA + MENA more than the US and the UK. In the last century, both countries have essentially gone "unchallenged by great power rivals" in the region (Gause, 2019, p.565). From the end of the Second World War to the 1990-91 Gulf War, the US and the UK shared three common strategic goals towards the region: maintaining inter-state order; protecting the supply of oil flowing to the West; and preventing Russian interference (Macris, 2010, p.249). British interests were increasingly commercially driven and not bounded by the ideas of containment that determined American foreign policy strategy in the region. "The United States' attempts to mould British policy in accordance with Cold War imperatives frequently foundered on Britain pursuing its own imperial interests" (Petersen, 2010, p.6). Anglo-American policies in the Middle East converged as long as London aligned with Washington's Cold War agenda. Despite the strong ties between the wartime allies, the Anglo-American alliance was far from smooth. Evidence of Anglo-American collusion was, more often than not, the exception and not the rule. At times, both powers pursued divergent policies, sometimes to the detriment of the alliance. Thus, the notion of 'specialness' has been the subject of significant debate within the study of AAR.

Some argue that, for Washington, the UK was no more valuable than other partnerships (Garron, 2014); however, the US heavily relied on Britain to play the role of security guarantor in the Middle East and surrounding region until British retrenchment in 1971 (Macris, 2010). London's view was that British influence was amplified by its close relationship with Washington. From 1945 to 1971, as the UK transitioned from the role of imperial power to a "great power in the second rank", London sought to use its close relationship to Washington to manage its waning decline (Shlaim and Sainsbury, 1997, p.192). As Chapters Three and Four will explore, this belief guided the Blair Government in 2001 who believed that British interests were best served so long as London stood 'shoulder to shoulder' with Washington (Blair, 2010, p.352); some scholars would equate this to the notion of bandwagoning.

The author recognises that there is an entire literature on AAR in CA + MENA which examines the full spectrum of US-UK engagement in the politics and security of the region following the Second World War including: Britain's retrenchment from the Gulf in 1971; the 'Nixon Doctrine' where the US advocated for regional powers, specifically Iran and Saudi Arabia, to take safeguard Gulf security (Petersen, 2009, pp.128-134); the 'Carter Doctrine' which further cemented American dominance in the region (Stephens, 2022, p.43) and US ascendance to the role of sole superpower in the Middle East following the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s.

Anglo-American relations have undergone every swing of the political pendulum in this region: from periods of discord over US-UK post-war policy in Palestine, coercion during the 1956 Suez crisis and the 1962-67 Yemen Civil War, through to periods of cooperation during the 1953 CIA and MI6 coup that overthrew the Mossadegh government in Iran and the 1990-91 Gulf War. While this chapter will not explore these historical

cases, it does note the different variations of power – coercion, cooperation and competition – which have defined and underpinned AAR in the region from 1945 to 1991, when the US emerged as the dominant hegemon in the region. Moreover, understanding the evolution of power within the Anglo-American alliance in CA + MENA from 1945 to 1991 provides important context for the four cases of Anglo-American interventions explored in this thesis.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks changed the prism through which London viewed CA + the MENA region. Previously, safeguarding its economic interests and managing imperial decline were the primary drivers for Britain's interference in the region since the Second World War, but following September 11, the main priority became promoting security and implementing counter-terrorism measures. This change in risk calculus drove the UK to align itself with American objectives in the region and to join the US-led intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 and the 2003 Iraq War (Hollis, 2022, p.13). This raises questions about the nature of Britain's special relationship with America, and how the UK utilised the alliance to pursue its own national interests in CA + MENA, particularly following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks which served as a turning point for US and UK foreign policy and grand strategy towards the region.

The decision to examine multiple cases means that the research has, at times, suffered from information overload, given the huge volume of data available. This limitation, however, has been mitigated by the following. Firstly, this research design produces in-depth analysis of the subject of AAR in CA + MENA during a specific time frame, and it provides the researcher with "an opportunity to gain a deep holistic view of the research problem" (Baškarada, 2014, p.1). Secondly, these four cases have been chosen specifically as they explore the object of study, in this case, the Anglo-American alliance,

across two distinct contextual settings: military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq to promote international security and humanitarian intervention in Libya and Syria to manage regional disorder following the 2011 Arab Uprisings. While these cases share many similarities, they also differ in critical ways; thus, the intention is that examination across these two contextual settings will reveal new insights about AAR and the UK's use of smart power.

All four case study chapters have been thematically structured in the same way to ensure there is a clear comparison between the cases. Each case begins with a brief introduction of the situational context as well as an examination of the UK's political and military role in the intervention. Then, using the sub-research questions as a guide, each case study chapter has been structured to examine how smart power was operationalised by the UK government by examining the following: the complementarity and integration of hard and soft power tools; the role of context in the implementation of smart power; the utilisation of the 'special relationship' as a device through which the UK projected power; and the role of personal relations and individual leader's national role conceptions. Finally, using the framework of smart power, each chapter concludes by determining whether the UK was successful in influencing US intervention.

### 1.33 Data Collection Methods

This thesis takes a qualitative, inductive approach towards the research methods used. The researcher has gathered and analysed qualitative data from 29 semi-structured interviews with British and American political and military elite to understand US-UK dynamics during the proposed period of study, post-9/11 to 2013. Throughout this thesis, the terms 'London', 'UK' and 'British/UK government' - as the decisionmakers for UK foreign policy in CA + MENA – will be used interchangeably. Relatedly, as this thesis asserts that the personal relations between leaders is crucial to the exercise of British smart

power, the individuals examined, specifically Tony Blair and David Cameron, are also used interchangeably with the aforementioned terms when explaining some of the views, decisions and actions of the UK government to influence US foreign policy in the MENA region. This also applies to the use of 'Washington', 'US', and 'American/US government' to denote American decision-making. Moreover, the term 'elite level' is used to distinguish political elites in the US and UK whose positions of power within government enabled them to decisively inform, shape and influence political outcomes.

As this thesis studies US-UK relations from a largely British perspective, the majority of interviews were conducted with British officials to reflect views from London, although interviews with notable US figures, such as former Secretary of State for Defence Robert Gates who served under Republican (Bush) and Democratic (Obama) administrations, were still conducted and incorporated in the analysis. Some of the individuals interviewed include former UK Ambassador to the US Sir David Manning (2003 – 2007), Britain's first National Security Adviser (2010 – 2012), Sir Peter Ricketts, and US Ambassador to the UN John Bolton. It is important to emphasise that gaining access to these high-ranking individuals was not an easy task and that the researcher took a 'quality over quantity' approach when identifying prospective interview participants. The individuals who were interviewed for this thesis have served in some of the highest levels of government, both within London and Washington, and thus, their insights and perspectives, albeit representative of individual perceptions and personal bias, have brought weight and credibility to the research findings. The researcher identified interviewees through online research and personal accounts of former US and UK government officials; for example, the memoirs of former British prime ministers highlighted key figures who were involved in the decision-making process for specific security interventions in CA + MENA.

The researcher encountered some difficulty in accessing these “hard-to-reach populations” (Parker, Scott and Geddes, 2019, p.4), including some of the individuals mentioned. Thus, in addition to online research of interviewees’ contact details, the researcher also used ‘snowball sampling’, a popular method in qualitative research, in which interviewees were asked to recommend other potential contacts who “fit the research criteria and who potentially might also be willing participants, who then in turn recommend other potential participants” (ibid., p.3).

This thesis used semi-structured interviews because they allow for open-ended conversation and the ability for the discussion to deviate from the list of prepared questions, as this can lead to insights that might not have otherwise been revealed had the researcher used a more structured interview method. Moreover, using semi-structured interviews is useful for exploring sensitive and complex topics, and it gives interviewees more freedom to express their views and opinions they believe are important to the conversation (Marsh and Stoker, 1995). This was particularly helpful for examining the Iraq War, for example, which was and continues to be a controversial and emotionally charged topic that has multiple layers to unpack.

Despite these limitations, the researcher still managed to conduct over two dozen interviews with some of the leading decision-makers in London and Washington between 2001 and 2013. For example, the researcher secured interviews with every British ambassador to the US who served between 1997 and 2013, including the late Sir Christopher Meyer (1997 – 2003), Sir David Manning (2003 – 2007), Sir Nigel Sheinwald (2007 – 2012) and Sir Peter Westmacott (2012 – 2016). This was particularly enlightening when it came to mapping the underlying patterns and diverging interests within the special relationship over time.

Another limitation of this technique is that the interviews were conducted between ten to twenty years after the time period under study – years in which further political developments have occurred and some conflicts have ceased while others have persisted. Interviewees were asked to reflect on their own experiences of events, and even if their memories were accurate when recalling key details and relaying important information, their perspectives were undoubtedly influenced by the years that have passed since the interventions had first occurred. Moreover, research participants had the advantage of hindsight when providing their opinions and perspectives, and hindsight bias can cause distortions of memories and information known before an event has occurred which runs the risk of skewing the data. Thus, this made the practice of cross-checking the data to ensure accurate analysis even more necessary.

As interviewing can be used with other data collection techniques, the researcher employed archival research of over 120 primary sources including policy reports, defence papers, press releases, speeches and other government documents that are publicly available. Other sources such as autobiographies and interviews were also consulted. By supplementing the interview data with archival research and secondary source materials, the researcher could map trends and cross-examine information by identifying and sorting patterns within the interview data. Relatedly, cross-referencing the interview data against primary and secondary sources was imperative as this helped mitigate against the risk of collecting potentially inaccurate data from interviews.

As the data was analysed, the author endeavoured to remain neutral by keeping herself "out of the data" to draw empirically based and objective conclusions (Kapiszeweski, MacLean and Read, 2015, p.191). Given her professional and personal interest in this thesis, the researcher has taken account of her own positionality within the research by reflecting on personal biases. As a US army 'brat' who grew up in the

American military community during the 1990s and early 2000s, the researcher has been impacted by the events of September 11, 2001, and the US' involvement in the subsequent 9/11 wars. Family members and friends of the researcher have served in combat, specifically in Afghanistan and Iraq. The researcher holds a deep respect and a fondness for the US, as well as the UK military community, her spouse and father-in-law, have and are currently serving with the UK Royal Air Force, respectively. Throughout this thesis, the researcher has reflected on and accounted for her own identity as a US-UK dual national, with military ties on both sides of the Atlantic, and how these may have guided the research questions, data analysis and interpretation as well as interactions with interviewees.

### 1.34 Ethical Implications

It is important to discuss the ethical implications of the research methods used as well as to address the study's limitations. Where possible, the interviews were conducted in person, which is viewed as the 'gold standard' within social science. However, due to several reasons, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent reliance on digital technologies to conduct academic fieldwork, the majority of interviews were conducted over Zoom. The increased use of digital methods to conduct academic fieldwork has notable ethical and practical implications for the research. Two primary issues, in particular, were considered as fieldwork was conducted. Firstly, the researcher ensured that using digital technology did not impact the safety or privacy of research participants. Secondly, she confirmed that the quality and standards of the fieldwork were not negatively impacted by conducting interviews in a digital setting rather than in person.

While online interviews are considered a less desirable option, they were viewed as a more convenient choice for interviewees' busy schedules. Online interviews provided

interviewees more flexibility and convenience to choose their preferred times and locations who may not otherwise have the time or capacity to meet face-to-face. However, while it was possible to engage in meaningful dialogue over video conferencing; it required more effort to establish rapport with interviewees, especially as, in most cases, the researcher and interviewees had no prior contact. Using digital platforms, like Zoom, made interviewing more challenging as, at times, it was difficult to read interviewees' body language and to ascertain non-verbal cues which, in turn, may have impacted the quality of the relationship that the researcher was seeking to develop.

For in person interviews, the location of the interviews took place at a mutually agreed location, either in the participant's office or in a public setting such as a café. Depending on personal preferences, some participants were asked to take part in a follow-up interview. Where travel was permitted, the researcher stayed updated about COVID-19 related travel restrictions including quarantine requirements and local public health laws to protect the well-being and safety of interviewees. Moreover, at times, safety protocols such as mask-wearing and social distancing were followed, especially when conducting face-to-face interviews. It was also considered whether the interviews were an ethical use of the interviewees' time given the added burden that COVID-19 had already placed on people's well-being and safety.

Before each interview, written consent was obtained; this was also confirmed via email correspondence. The interviewees were made aware of the research topic before the interview was conducted and that the information they provided would be used to develop the PhD thesis at Durham University as well as for other academic publications. All interview data obtained during the study has remained confidential. Before the data was published, the researcher obtained interviewees' consent to use the data as well as to quote them directly. Interviewees also had the option to see the interview transcripts, if

requested. Equally, the interviewees reserved the option to withdraw their participation at any time during the study or to retract specific quotes. Except the signed consent forms, all interview data was immediately anonymised. All data has been stored securely on a personal laptop, and it has also been backed up on a USB, both of which can only be accessed by the principal researcher. The data files have been password protected to ensure anonymity and the safety of research participants, including sensitive data. Metadata such as analysis of the interview data was organised, located and backed up in the same manner.

Following the interviews, the recordings were immediately transferred from the voice recorder and backup recording device to the laptop and then the audio files were deleted from both devices. There was also a list of interviewees with a random code attributed to the data files containing the interviewee's recording and information; only the principal researcher has had access to this numbering system and these audio files.

### 1.4 Main Arguments of the Research

The following diagram provides a visualisation of the primary goal of this research – to reconceptualise and reinterpret the US-UK special relationship from a British perspective by using the framework of smart power to understand whether the UK influenced US foreign policy behaviour in CA + MENA post-9/11. While this thesis is solely concerned with understanding the impact of British influence on US decision-making, the researcher also recognises that other factors have played a role in shaping US policy in CA + MENA post-9/11. As such, this thesis takes care to avoid claiming that US foreign policy decisions were solely shaped by London.

The thematic structure of each of the four case studies lends itself to a comparative approach to explore these episodes of Anglo-American intervention. As depicted below, this thesis will compare and contrast US-UK relations in the build-up to the wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq, where the alliance claimed it intervened in the region to promote international security in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, against Anglo-American interventions in Libya and Syria post-Arab Uprisings in 2011, which were launched in response to humanitarian crises and regional instability. The diagram below visualises two hypotheses drawn from the research questions: firstly, the special relationship has evolved post-9/11 to 2013 with the UK projecting greater influence over US policy, suggesting that the UK has exercised greater agency within the special relationship. Secondly, interventions in Libya and Syria demonstrate a divergence of norms and values within the Anglo-American relationship as the alliance moves from cases of intervention to promote international security to cases of managing regional disorder.

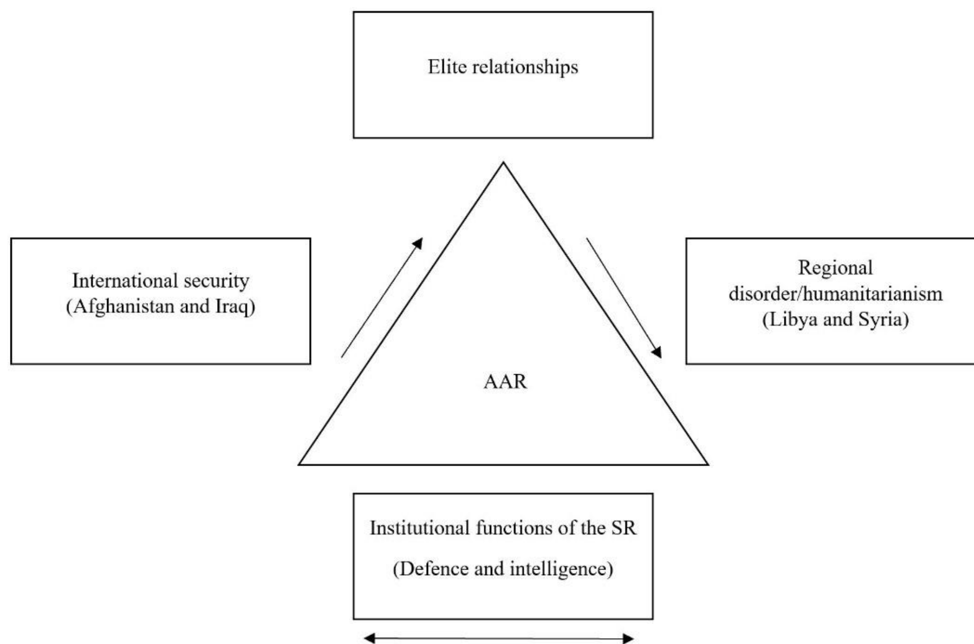


Figure 1.1 Smart power in Anglo-American relations

Given the vast amount of existing literature on AAR, it is imperative to define the parameters of this thesis by reiterating what it explores and clarifying what it does not. Firstly, as mentioned, the existing AAR literature covers a wide array of topics, such as the defence and intelligence relationship between the US and UK. However, this thesis is not

designed to examine this aspect of the alliance. This dimension of the alliance possesses an internal dynamic of its own, and there has been considerable research conducted on this aspect of the relationship to which this thesis does not seek to contribute. Instead, this thesis examines the elite-level relationships between London and Washington measured against four cases of intervention in CA + MENA. Moreover, the research design offers a unique approach to studying AAR as the existing literature contains minimal research on the study of the elite-level decision-making process between the US and UK against four individual conflicts that have decisively shaped the trajectory of AAR post-9/11 and the ability of the UK, in particular, to exercise influence in CA + MENA.

While this study would have initially wanted to incorporate research on the intelligence aspect of the relationship, much of the research already exists in the public domain, such as the 2004 Butler Review and the 2016 Chilcot Report. Within the literature on the US-UK intelligence relationship, Richard Kerbaj (2022) has surveyed the history of the 'five eyes' from its inception in the Second World War to the current Russian and Chinese threats that have challenged and reshaped Western security in the contemporary age. Similarly, Michael Smith (2022) has produced a significant body of work on the history of the Anglo-American intelligence relationship, what he has called the 'real' special relationship, tracing the alliance's close collaboration from Bletchley Park in 1941 in the run-up to the Second World War to the Reagan-Thatcher years during the Cold War where both countries continued to work together to counter the Soviet threat. Michael Herman (1996) has previously outlined the history and attributes of the US-UK intelligence relationship, and has offered some lessons learned for future counter-terrorism practices.

Peter Oborne's work on the Chilcot Report provides a forensic examination into the inner workings of how the Blair government made the legal case to join the US-led war

in Iraq. He argued, in particular, that the evidence was doctored to justify a war for regime change, and has pointed to the unusual closeness between the British intelligence community, specifically the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), and those inside the Blair 'war cabinet' as evidence that the UK government failed to function (2016, pp.1701-172). Moreover, American journalist Mark Danner has examined US-UK decision-making in Iraq by investigating the so-called 'Downing Street Memo' and how the American and British intelligence communities played a role in "fixing the intelligence and the facts" around the policy to invade Iraq (2006, p.xv).

Equally, however, there is also a lack of available data, in particular, on the US-UK intelligence relationship in Libya and Syria. In fact, information about the US-UK intelligence relationship during the 2003 Iraq War has only become available as a result of the Chilcot Inquiry, which was launched in 2009 and officially published in 2016. The same can be said about the intervention in Afghanistan, which, at the time of writing in Summer 2023, has not resulted in a formal inquiry that either examines the initial intervention or the UK's chaotic withdrawal in August 2021. As such, given the lack of available data about the other three cases, it would not be possible to explore the US-UK intelligence relationship based on just one case study alone. Moreover, for various reasons, including the issue of protecting sources, American and British officials are wary of discussing the use of intelligence in foreign policymaking.

It is also necessary to clarify that this thesis examines AAR from a British perspective, specifically with regard to how the UK understands and uses smart power to project influence in CA + MENA. Additionally, it is important to highlight the period of time this thesis studies, from moments following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks to the US-Russian joint initiative to eliminate chemical weapons in Syria in September 2013. This thesis specifically focuses on US-UK decision-making in the lead up to each of

the four conflicts, and therefore it does not explore the aftermath of these interventions. While the author understands and recognises that consequentialism plays a part in the following interventions, they are not analysed in depth. Due to the sheer volume of available research and data that would need to be collected and analysed, this thesis does not examine the entire time frame of each individual conflict, as this would have required another three to four-year period of doctoral research. However, this limitation is mitigated against the fact that the outcomes of each intervention are accounted for in the subsequent cases, as each one informs and impacts the context of the following case study.

## 1.5 Thesis Outline

This introductory chapter has offered a summary of the main arguments of this thesis together with the contributions it will make to the existing scholarship on AAR in CA + MENA. It has also introduced the research design and methods used in this research, as well as the four case studies under investigation. The remainder of this thesis will proceed as follows: Chapter Two surveys the existing literature on the study of power as it pertains to the study of AAR. The research consults the various strands of the realist, liberal and constructivist traditions in international relations and their different approaches to the conception of power. Finally, this chapter will introduce the conception of smart power as a framework for analysis to reconceptualise the special relationship and to examine the projection and limitations of British influence on US policy in CA + MENA post-9/11.

Chapter Three tests the framework of smart power against the first case of Anglo-American intervention in Afghanistan. It explores the research on US-UK relations in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and it examines how the UK sought to influence the US agenda in the build-up to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan

on October 7, 2001. Chapter Four examines how the UK sought to shape the scope of the US-led invasion of Iraq that took place on March 20, 2003. Unlike the war in Afghanistan, which generated considerable US support and sentiment from other countries, and whose legality was never really questioned, the Iraq War possesses critical differences from Afghanistan as a case study. It was waged in response to the supposed risk of a rogue regime acquiring weapons of mass destruction and posing a threat to global security, a threat that garnered much scrutiny and criticism from the international community.

Chapter Five explores Western intervention of Libya in March 2011 following the wave of public demonstrations and democratic revolts in the wake of the 2011 Arab Uprisings. This chapter, as well as the following chapter on Syria, tests smart power across a different contextual setting when NATO's Operation Unified Protector, which took over from the US-led operation, Operation Odyssey Dawn, was launched in response to the threat of a looming humanitarian crisis in Benghazi. This chapter examines how the UK sought to project a greater leadership role in contrast to America, who had become increasingly reluctant to intervene in the aftermath of the controversial 9/11 wars. Chapter Six explores the final case, Anglo-American intervention in Syria. Like Libya, Syria provides a different contextual setting in which to study the dynamics of US-UK intervention in the face of another humanitarian catastrophe. However, as the thesis examines, both countries were reluctant to use the instrument of hard power to maintain regional disorder, and instead, sought to exhaust other tools of national power. Against this backdrop, this chapter seeks to understand how the UK sought to influence US policy preferences in Syria, specifically the use of hard power, to punish the Assad regime and to degrade the regime's chemical weapons (CW) stockpiles. Chapter Seven concludes this thesis by discussing the value and contribution of this research to the wider literature on

AAR in CA + MENA and by summarising the key research findings about smart power. This chapter also proposes avenues for future research on US-UK relations.

# Chapter 2. Understanding power

*"You can do a lot with diplomacy, but with diplomacy backed up by force you can get a lot more done."* (Kofi Annan, 1998)

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the extensive body of literature on the study of power as it relates to Anglo-American relations to address the core research question: *how did the UK influence US intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria between 2001-2013?* This thesis interrogates the various strands of the realist, liberal and constructivist traditions in international relations and their different approaches to the conception of power. It also explores the different types of power – hard and soft – before introducing the concept of smart power, which this thesis uses as a conceptual framework to answer its core research question. As this thesis studies the power dynamics within the US-UK alliance, this chapter will examine the concept of power within the context of international relations, and therefore, it does not extensively explore the construct of power within the realms of political science and sociology, where power is viewed as the ability to influence or control others within the social structures of the state (Waltz, 1979, p.88), although it acknowledges that both disciplines have contributed significantly to the study of power and influence.

Studying power will help provide a conceptual lens through which we can take the temperature of AAR from 2001, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks through to 2013 during the Syrian civil war, where US-UK relations reached a nadir following the close relations of the Bush-Blair years. Some scholars such as Thomas L. Ilgen (2006) and Robert Kagan (2003) argue that a transatlantic drift was already apparent, given the diverging power capabilities between Washington and London. Upon closer inspection, however, this argument is a superficial assessment of US-UK power

dynamics. Further examination of the nature and operationalisation of power is required to understand how the UK has viewed power and deployed it to influence the policy preferences of its dominant partner within the alliance, the United States.

### 2.2 Power and Influence in International Relations

Central to this thesis is understanding the scope and domain of power. As a concept, power is incredibly elusive, difficult to quantify and remains highly contested amongst academics (Gallie, 1956). The subject of power has long been a central concern for international relations scholars because it appears as both an end and means in politics. As Joseph Nye said: "We cannot say that an actor 'has power' without specifying power 'to do what'" (Nye, 2011, p.6). Some theorists have conceived of power as the "production of intended results" (Russell, 1938) or the ability to make decisions for others (Dahl, 1957); while others have identified power as a force, neither good nor evil, to be wielded in the direction of the agent's choosing (Arendt, 1970, pp.44-52).

Nye defined power as "the capacity to do things and in social situations to affect others to get the outcomes we want" (2011, p.6), one might also call this influence. It is important to differentiate between power and influence, as both concepts feature prominently in the discourse on global politics and the ability for states to advance their own national interests, and much of the scholarship has failed to distinguish between the two concepts. One school of thought within the literature views power and influence as synonymous concepts (Moyer, Sweijs, Burrows and Van Manen, 2018, p.6). German sociologist and political theorist Max Weber viewed power and influence as instruments that can be possessed and exercised by a dominant actor "over persons" what he described as "domination" (Uphoff, 1989, p.302).

Relatedly, scholars Robert Dahl (1957), Steven Lukes (1974), Talcott Parsons (1963) Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz (1962) argued power and influence operate

interchangeably and should be examined within the context of interacting relationships in which coercion and influence are exerted as "an instrument that powerful agents use to alter the free actions of the powerless" (Hayward, 1998, p. 1). According to this framework, commanding change, controlling agendas and establishing preferences form three aspects of relational power. Dahl's 'first face of power' focused on the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences (Dahl, 1957, pp. 202-2-4; Nye, 2011, pp.11-14). In contrast, Bachrach and Baratz (1962) contended that the scope of power is wider than Dahl previously suggested; power is not simply about making decisions, they argue, but about framing political agendas. This 'second face of power' is described as "powerful actors making sure that the less powerful are never invited to the table, or if they get there, the rules of the game have already been set by those who arrived first" (Nye, 2011, p.12). In other words, if one can control the context within which decisions are made, then one can influence those decisions (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962, pp. 948-949).

Lukes challenged Bachrach and Baratz' 'second face of power' and offered a further understanding of power which he coined the 'radical' view of power where the dominant actor, in addition to its decision-making and agenda-setting capabilities, engages in thought control or manipulation over a subordinate actor (Lukes, 1974, p.27). Power not only influences whether actors behave according to their initial preferences, but power also shapes the ways they observe those preferences (Hayward, 1998, p. 4). These conceptions of power as an instrument raise questions around the subject of influence, specifically between one's free actions and actions that are shaped by the influence of others.

Another school of thought differentiates between power and influence, and argues that power is something an actor possesses whilst influence is something that can be exercised to affect change (Moyer, Sweijs, Burrows and Van Manen, 2018, p.6). This view

aligns with the work of realist scholars such as Waltz who argued that a nation's material resources play a role in a state's ability to influence the behaviours and action of others (Waltz, 1979, pp.102-111). Considering these debates, it then raises the following questions: can one have power without influence and vice versa? Moreover, does power produce influence or does influence produce power? Ultimately, there are numerous examples of influential individuals who lacked material power.

On the one hand, the concept of influence includes an aspect of power (Willer, Lovaglia and Markovsky, 1997, p.573). Scholars Wrong (1979) and French and Raven (1959) treated power as synonymous with influence and emphasised coercion and control similar to the concept of hard power. Others, like Zelditch (1992, p.995), distinguished the two concepts and argued that influence is the ability for actors to persuade others to modify their behaviour. Similarly, Mokken and Stockman (1976, pp. 35-37) defined the exercise of influence by "persuasion, information and advice" in contrast to "force, coercion and sanctions" which are indicative of the exercise of power. Mokken and Stockman's definition is reminiscent of soft power and hard power, respectively; two concepts that are key to understanding smart power and something that this chapter will explore.

For the purposes of this thesis, the author conceives of power and influence as interrelated but separate concepts and makes the distinction between power capabilities and outcomes. This distinction between power measured in outcomes and power measured in terms of resources is important for understanding the relationship between power, influence and US-UK foreign policy. The possession of power resources does not always achieve the intended outcomes. It is not enough for states to simply possess resources, they also must have the capacity to use them as tools of influence, something Nye (1990) referred to as the "issue of power conversion". Considering these debates on power and

influence, this thesis examines British smart power across four cases of crisis decision-making in order to determine whether the UK was successful in influencing the policy preferences of the United States in CA + MENA post-9/11.

**2.21 Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism**

As a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and renewed US-UK engagement in CA + MENA, many scholars and practitioners have employed a realist conception of power to examine the US' use of unilateral military action post-9/11 and to explain the reaction of other states, who responded by either balancing against or bandwagoning with American power. Ultimately, this thesis is grounded in a realist understanding of power as it examines inter-state relations acting in an international system defined by anarchy. However, it recognises the value of considering alternative understandings of power, such as Liberalism and Constructivism, and as such these approaches will also be discussed.

Realism considers how states seek to survive and retain power in the international system. According to this approach, power plays out as follows: the international system is characterised by anarchy, competition and conflict; power is understood as the resources available to states for building up their military capabilities; states are seen as key actors in the international system that make rational strategic decisions that align with their national self-interests; and states 'calculate' each other in terms of their power capabilities (Glaser, 2010, pp. 16-17).

Proponents of classical realism, which attributes the origins of conflict to human weaknesses (Spirtas, 1996, pp.387-400), have drawn on works from early thinkers such as Greek historian, Thucydides (Walt, 2002). Cited as one of the earliest proponents of balance of power, Thucydides argued that power operates as an inter-state regulator which he used to explain the shift in the distribution of power between Athens and Sparta during the Peloponnesian War in the 5th century. His famous 'Melian dialogue' which stipulated

that inter-state relations permit "the majority rules because it is stronger, the weaker submits because it is weaker" (Milner, 1991, p.79) illustrates the role of fear as a characteristic of power. While his work preceded *The Prince* by several centuries, one cannot help but think of Machiavelli's (1532) "might makes right" approach to power and governance.

For classical realists like Hans Morgenthau (1954), human nature, specifically man's desire for the accumulation of power, explains the struggle for power in the international system. Similarly, Bertrand Russell (1938) argued that man's love of power explained the state and development of the world; primarily how authoritarian figures like Hitler and Stalin rose to positions of power in the late 1930s. Meanwhile, neo-realists, also known as structural realists, argued that it is the structure of the international system itself, not mankind's desire for the accumulation of power, that drives state actors to maximise their relative power for survival (Glaser, 2010, pp.18-24). Kenneth Waltz (1979) argued that certain variables (i.e. how much power a state possesses) can be physically measured while human nature cannot be assessed in the same way. Offensive realists, such as John Mearsheimer, argued that the best strategy for states to ensure their survival is by maximising as much power relative to other states as possible and to pursue hegemony (2001, pp.32-36). Mearsheimer claimed that power maximisation is not self-defeating, as previously suggested by Stephen Walt (1987), but argued that states can rationally work towards regional hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.337-346). One only needs to observe America's presence in the Middle East to see his theory of regional hegemony in practice.

Others, such as David A. Baldwin argued that power is measured by the possession of resources (military, population, natural resources and GDP) whilst others view power as a relationship (2016, p.2). In line with the former approach, Edward H. Carr (1964, p.109) argued that military power was the most important element of national power in

international relations as it served as both an ends and a means. Critics of this conception of power, such as Jeffrey Hart, argued that measuring state power by the possession of resources, what he calls the ‘control over resources’ approach, does not fully account for those which are difficult to measure both in terms of quantity and impact, such as leadership skills and the will to use force (1976, p.290). This thesis notes both of these realist interpretations of power - the possession of resources and the capability to use national instruments of power – in examining how the UK has used various tools of power to project influence within the Anglo-American alliance. Additionally, this thesis also interprets the special relationship between the US and UK as a form of institutional power on a global level, and therefore sees power as relational.

When examining the role of British influence within the Anglo-American alliance, Stephen Walt’s (1987) research on balance of power theory is an obvious starting point (Elman and Jensen, 2013, p.21). According to this theory, a state ensures its survival by preventing another state from gaining power to dominate others. As a state increases in power, it will drive weaker states to form a defensive alliance, thereby producing a more unstable system as a result. A.F.K. Organski (1968, p.364) challenged Walt’s theory by suggesting that hegemony, not a balance of power, produces peace and stability. Organski (1968) believed that war between major powers was unlikely when the international system is dominated by a single power. Due to the hegemon’s privileged position however, it often shapes the rules and practices of the international system in such a way that benefits their own interests (Gilpin, 1981; Elman and Jensen, 2013, p.24).

Critics of Realism have argued that it does not account for change in the international system (Walker, 1987; Spruyt, 1994). For example, Waltz’ (1979) conception of neorealism describes a static international order that failed to explain major events, such

as the end of the Cold War and dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Moreover, Realism fails to interpret the post-Cold War period, which saw a new era of limited great power competition and the wave of democratisation across Eastern Europe (Rosenberg, 1990, pp.295-300). As a framework, Realism is also too state-centric (Spruyt, 1994, pp.11-15) and overlooks other elements within the state, such as individual actors, who have agency to act and whose actions can determine outcomes within the international system. In response to Realism's emphasis on great power politics and national interest, alternative theories, such as Liberalism, have looked to account for the changing nature of international politics.

Liberalism emphasises the role of individual freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law in shaping interactions between states. Unlike Realism, Liberalism does not view states as the sole actors within the international system, but conceives of power through a more open perspective, emphasising the role of international institutions, individual agents and global cooperation in mitigating conflict between actors in the international system (Navari, 2013, p.44). One of the core tenets of Liberalism, democratic peace theory, first developed by Immanuel Kant in his 1795 work, *Perpetual Peace*, asserts that states with liberal democratic forms of government and a "propensity to externalise democratic norms" are less likely to go to war with one another (Simpson, 2019, p.109). Kant drew on the work of Jean Jacques Rousseau who argued that states naturally balance against one another through the forming of alliances (Vaughan, 1917), or what Kant referred to as, "a federation of states" (Bourke, 1942, p.329). Liberalism cites three factors that foster increased cooperation and decrease inter-state tensions: international institutions, which provide a system in which to resolve disputes non-violently; international trade, as states whose economies are interconnected are less likely

to be in conflict with one another; and the spread of liberal norms such as human rights, democracy and rule of law (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999).

In the post-Cold War era, when great power competition lessened and global interdependence among state actors emerged as a prominent feature of the international system, new theories arose in the liberal tradition, such as neo-liberalism, to explain these international developments. Neoliberalism specifically highlights the role of international institutions in facilitating cooperation among states. In contrast to Liberalism, neo-liberalism aligns with the realist notion that the state, or the collection of states, remain the primary actors in the international system. According to this tradition, power alone cannot explain outcomes in the international system; these are better understood with reference to liberal values, interdependence and international institutions (Moravcsik, 1997). Moreover, neo-liberalism argues that states exert power from a variety of different motivations such as the rule of law, integration and democratisation (Dittgen and Peters, 2001; Navari, 2013, p.46). Kenneth Boulding (1989, p.10) defined this as integrative power, the ability to create networks which enable actors to work together out of mutual respect, love, friendship and legitimacy in pursuit of shared common goals. To conclude, neo-liberalism sees the creation and maintenance of international institutions and norms as necessary to increase inter-state cooperation and to curb states' use of power that might lead to conflict.

A main criticism of these more traditional approaches to power, is that they do not account for the agency of individuals. In contrast to Realism, for which states are concerned with pursuing their own national interests and struggle for survival, and Liberalism, which emphasises the interdependency of state actors, Constructivism sees international politics as being shaped by the actions and perceptions of individual actors. Constructivism sees the world as socially constructed, or as Nicholas Onuf described, "the social world is of our own making" (Willard, 1992, p.145). Constructivist scholar,

Alexander Wendt (1992), argued that ideas and beliefs affect international politics, and that states' identities are socially constructed through their interactions with other states.

Many constructivists have drawn on Karl Deutsch's concept of a security community (1957, p.36), the idea that integrated interests produce a "we-feeling" amongst states (Agius, 2010, p.65). Adler and Barnett (1988) developed Deutsch's concept by emphasising the importance of shared values, identities and meanings for the development of security communities (Agius, 2010, p.59). Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin (1995), argue that the role of international institutions is to manage others' desires and preferences by taming the power of actors whose interests do not converge with those from within the institution. In their taxonomy of the four types of power, Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (2005, pp.51-52) have labelled this 'institutional power', where A exercises power over B where A occupies a specific role within a formal or informal institution. They argue that while most institutions are established to help actors achieve mutually agreed outcomes; they tend to create clear winners and losers where the 'winners' control the institutions that subsequentially constrain and shape the preferences of the 'losers' (ibid., p. 52). This is reminiscent of Organski's conception of power where dominant actors exploit the international system according to their own preferences at the expense of others. Similarly, Dennis Mumby (2013) has viewed power not through examining *what* power is, but rather *how* power operates within the international system, and argues that "power operates as a system of ideology construction, a network of social relations designed to sustain hegemony" (Ells, 2018, p.16).

The critical form of Constructivism emphasises the power of language, and draws on thinkers such as Michael Foucault (1982) who defined power as a function of power relations between multiple individuals that is neither bound by agency nor structure (Philip, 1983, p.34). Instead, this 'normalising power' is dispersed throughout public

discourse, knowledge and 'regimes of truth' which constructs one's view of the world, and in turn, this also shapes one's beliefs and decisions (ibid., p.37). According to Foucault, normalising power creates individuals who, by their own will, do what society wants them to do (Gaventa, 2003, p.2). While this thesis does not employ a post-structuralist framework to explore the power dynamics within AAR, the works of scholars, like Foucault, does highlight the contingent nature of power as a socially constructed phenomenon.

Constructivism has received ample criticism from rationalists and poststructuralists in international relations theory. Rationalists argue that Constructivism is difficult to test empirically as it relies on subjective factors, actors' norms, values and beliefs, which are less amenable to empirical analysis (Agius, 2010, pp.64-65). For example, Dale C. Copeland and Stephen Krasner highlight that there is little empirical evidence about cooperation (ibid.). Copeland (2006) argues that Constructivism fails to account for uncertainty and suggests that one cannot know whether an actor is acting cooperatively as their actions could be masking goals driven by aggression and self-interest. Krasner doubts the "power of norms when state interests are at stake" (Agius, 2010, p.64) as some norms, such as state sovereignty, can be violated (Krasner, 2000). Constructivism's state-centrism is also a point of contention for poststructuralist scholars who argue that the theory's emphasis on culture and norms could be potentially "dangerous" as these factors can be constructed as a threat and benefit dominant power relations (Agius, 2010, p.65).

While constructivist scholarship acknowledges the existence of power relations between states, it argues that power is ultimately derived from social constructions, not material sources, thus overlooking the role of power dynamics within the international system. Constructivism's emphasis on norms and identities could potentially overshadow the power inequalities that shape state behaviour and global politics. While norms certainly

play a role, they do not solely determine state behaviour; material interests and human nature are also crucial in determining state behaviour. Despite these limitations, examining Constructivism has value to understanding the construction of power as socially determined. Still, this thesis is ultimately concerned with examining state to state relations in an international system defined by anarchy, and as such, Realism best captures the essence and application of state power. This thesis, however, is also informed by these other conceptions of power, such as Constructivism's emphasis on the role of individuals' perceptions, which are key to understanding how power is exercised by individual leaders within the state.

To conclude, power is the key driver of a state's behaviour within the international system and the means by which states ensure their survival. While international relations scholars from realist, liberal and constructivist traditions recognise the value and utility of the study of power, they diverge on the origins and nature of power. As this section has noted, Realism argues that the primary goal of each state is the accumulation of power, Liberalism proposes an alternative solution based on the principles of collective cooperation, and Constructivism asserts that great power competition exists within the international political system because states create it. Ultimately, however, power is not solely about the possession of resources, but it is also concerned with outcomes. Moreover, this thesis understands power as an actor's ability to coerce, co-opt and persuade others to act in ways that are congruent with that actor's own interests. As such, this chapter will now examine the different types of power as it pertains to US-UK relations.

### 2.22 Hard and soft power

According to Nye's definition of power, state actors can affect other's behaviour in three main ways: threats of coercion (sticks), inducements or payments (carrots) and

attraction "that makes others want what you want" (2008, p.94). Hard power is the exercise of influence through coercive tactics like military intervention, coercive diplomacy, inducements of payment and economic sanctions (Wilson, 2008, p. 114). This is similar to French and Raven's (1959, p.151) understanding of coercive power, when one punishes others for noncompliance, and reward power, when one compensates others to reward their compliance. Lawrence Freedman and Srinath Raghavan (2013, pp.206-207) associate hard power with coercion which they have defined as "the deliberate use of overt threats of force to influence another's strategic choices". This is comparable to Robert Pape's (2003, pp.8-9) advocation for military coercion, specifically the tactic of denial, to influence the enemy's behaviour. He cites the 1991 Iraq War as proof that denial, in contrast to other coercive strategies like decapitation, was successful in influencing Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. In the wake of 9/11 and in the early phases of the Iraq war, the US and UK governments relied primarily on hard coercive strategies to combat terrorism and to counter political violence.

International relations scholars have debated whether states can deploy soft power as a viable form of power in comparison to traditional hard power. Joseph Nye (1990) and John McClory (2016) are more optimistic of the merits of soft power as an effective instrument of statecraft while others like Colin Gray (2011, pp.31-32) have contested the utility of soft power, arguing that military power retains primacy. Still, scholars like Baldwin (2016, p.15) have argued that hard power has been overly exaggerated in its effectiveness, and suggested that power extends beyond traditional military power and coercive methods. According to Baldwin, soft power plays a crucial role in shaping outcomes in the international system as states can deploy soft power to affect the behaviour of other states through non-coercive means. As Nye argued, soft power is "less relevant" than hard power in protecting national interests, allies and preventing attack, but

soft power is more relevant to realising one's "milieu goals", such as "shaping an environment conducive to democracy" (Nye, 2004, pp.28-31).

This thesis draws on Nye's conception of soft power as one of the main components of smart power. Nye's research on soft power has had a profound impact on both the theory and practice of foreign policy, particularly US foreign policy. In response to Paul Kennedy (1988), who claimed that US power was declining due to "imperial overstretch", Nye (1990) argued that state actors, such as the US, possess unique 'soft power' capabilities to lead and to influence the rest of the world. In his book *Bound to Lead*, Nye defined soft power as "the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes you want…by attraction rather than coercion or payment" (Nye, 1990, p. 154). Nye (2008, p. 96) argued that a state's soft power relies on three resources: "culture (where it is considered attractive to others); political values (where it lives up to them at home and abroad); and foreign policies (when others see them as legitimate)." Other advocates of the soft power approach, such as John McClory who founded the Soft Power 30 Index, have expanded on Nye's conception by proposing an alternative framework for classifying soft power resources which includes: government, culture, global engagement, education, digital diplomacy and business enterprise (McClory and Harvey, 2016, p.315).

A discussion of soft power and the operationalisation of soft power must include a discussion around agenda-setting and preference-control, what Nye refers to as the second and third faces of power. While Nye associates the first face, "command power", with hard power and the ability to get desired outcomes through coercion or payment; he argues that the second and third faces of power are synonymous with soft power, the ability to get preferred outcomes through co-operative means of agenda-setting and attraction (Nye, 2011, p.16). Nye argues that if an actor uses agenda-framing and persuasion to get others to want the same outcomes, then it is unnecessary to overturn their initial preferences using

coercion or inducements; in this sense, soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others. Soft power is more than just persuasion, Nye argues, but it is also the ability to attract and to entice (2008, p.616). In terms of power resources, soft power resources are those that produce attraction (ibid.). Thus, given the 'attractive' nature of America's resources, such as its culture, values and policies, Nye argues that the US can lead without the need to resort to force or manipulation. Joffe made a similar argument about America's soft power, arguing that it was larger than its economic and military capabilities: "US culture…radiates outward with an intensity last seen in the days of the Roman empire-but with a novel twist. Rome's…cultural sway stopped exactly at their military borders. America's soft power rules over an empire on which the sun never sets" (2001, p.43).

While Nye's soft power theory has been widely accepted by academics and politicians as a diplomatic tool, there has been ample debate over its usefulness and robustness as a concept of power. Nye's soft power has been criticised for being too reductionist (Swartz 2005; Townshend 2007), in allowing actors ownership over societal structures (Guzzini, 1993) and for failing to describe why soft power resources – culture, political values and foreign policies – are the "right ones" to amass and to deploy as tools of influence (Mattern, 2004, p.588). In contrast to hard power, which traditionally has been measured by criteria such as military capabilities, population size, natural resources and geography (Nye and Armitage, 2007, p.6); soft power resources are more difficult to categorise and to quantify. Matteo Pallaver (2011, p.81) argues that one of the reasons politicians and policymakers have difficulty 'buying in' to the concept of soft power is because soft power outcomes are more intangible and sometimes take many years to transpire. By contrast, hard power results are easily measured and more substantial.

Colin Gray has contested the view that soft power can be utilised as an instrument of foreign policy and concluded that military force will continue to remain a core instrument of policy, although he has admitted that some situations necessitate diplomatic intervention rather than force (2011, p.46-49). Likewise, Kurt Campbell and Michael O'Hanlon (2006) advocated the use of military force to achieve national objectives. In their critique of the US Democratic Party's overreliance on soft power, they argued that "promoting soft power will amount to little unless they can master the first-order matters of traditional national security – that is, how and when to put force on targets" (Campbell and O'Hanlon, 2006, p.9). By contrast, Giulio Gallarotti (2015) suggested that the world has become more amenable to soft power opportunities, citing growing socio-economic and political interdependence as diminishing the utility of hard power.

Eric Li (2008) scrutinised Nye's claim about the universality of Western liberal values and argued that they have trouble "sticking" in some states, partly due to the erosion of American credibility following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and Arab states' failure to democratise during the 2011 Arab Uprisings. Li signalled the peaceful rise of China as an example of a state who, having rejected Western soft power – culturally, politically and institutionally - still rose to economic prominence and retained its own culture, ideology and set of institutions. Li also criticised Nye's application of soft power, highlighting American and Coalition forces' lack of a reconstruction plan in a post-Saddam Iraq to illustrate that soft power is ineffective when used on its own. Relatedly, Walter Russell Mead (2004) cited the rise of anti-Americanism as an illustration of the fragility of US soft power. Still, Mead argued that a combination of soft power, hard power and 'sticky' power, which he defined as economic power that entraps others through attraction, is what will ultimately sustain US global hegemony (2004, p. 50).

Another critique of soft power is concerning Nye's claim that values and culture can be used as instruments of effective foreign policy statecraft. Jimmy Parc and Hwy-Chang Moon's research (2018) on accumulated versus accumulable culture is a unique model to further investigate claims about the universalistic nature of Western soft power. Similar to Nye's definition, Parc and Moon described accumulable culture as possessing widespread appeal and attraction to others outside of the nation-state. While Nye, Parc and Moon rightfully maintained that Western liberalism maintains global appeal, historian Niall Ferguson (2003) has argued that US influence has more to do with popular culture and commercial goods (i.e. multinational brands like Coca Cola) and less with democratic ideals. "The trouble with soft power is that it is, well, soft", asserts Ferguson (2003, p. 21). While American culture may elicit widespread global envy; not all who consume American products share the same brand love for the US. Instead, the US has had to rely on a different kind of power – moral authority – to retain its global supremacy. Like material resources, Ferguson concluded that morality or faith is just as important a component of power.

For Ferguson, the issue of credibility takes centre stage in the power debate. Two things can either magnify or diminish the ability of any state actor to project power: its own legitimacy in the eyes of its people and in the eyes of other state actors (ibid, p.22). A state's 'moral authority', or what Ferguson described as the 'psychological dimension of power', might also act as a form of legitimacy which, though intangible and immeasurable, is arguably just as powerful as a material source of power. One only needs to look to the 'global war on terror' (GWOT) and failed nation-building efforts in Iraq to illustrate the impact of weakening American and British legitimacy. According to Matthew Kroenig, Melissa McAdam and Steven Weber (2010, p.413), a government's legitimacy is an essential precondition for it to effectively deploy soft power as an instrument of statecraft.

It was the absence of this particular soft power precondition, the credibility of the messenger and the message itself to persuade the target audience to change its attitudes on a political issue, that contributed to America's and Britain's failure to win hearts and minds in Iraq as well as to counter the ideological support for terrorism.

The issue of legitimacy raises important questions in the debate over soft power: can a state's approach to the use of soft power undermine its legitimacy? Can soft power be counter-productive and repel rather than attract? According to Nye, credibility is a crucial source of soft power: "Politics in an information age is ultimately about whose story wins" (2008, p.100). Scholars Paul Brannagan and Richard Giulianotti (2018) and Hamed El-Said (2015) argued that soft power strategies can lead to unintended consequences, otherwise known as the 'soft power disempowerment nexus'. For soft power to take shape, a state actor must generate public interest which in turn often provides opportunities to scrutinise the state actor and to identify its failures (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2018). It is within this transaction that soft power disempowerment occurs; a state or nonstate actor will disseminate information which discredits the state's soft power strategies (ibid., p.1152). According to Brannagan and Guilianotti (ibid., p.1151), a credible attraction filter must exist in which both the soft power sender and receiver agree on what is considered attractive; only then can one determine whether a state's outcomes are empowering or not. The US' and Coalition forces' approach to its counter-terrorism policy illustrates this notion of soft power disempowerment (El-Said, 2015). The implementation of 'soft' de-radicalisation programmes involved using grassroots tactics such as community policing; however, despite these approaches taking place on a societal level, they led to a rise in Islamophobia and the stigmatisation of Muslim communities, and in the process, they undermined American credibility among some communities at home and abroad.

Kroenig, McAdam and Weber (2010, p. 421) have examined the ‘logic of persuasion’ to explain some of the limiting factors of US soft power and their impact on US counter-terrorism policies in Afghanistan and Iraq. According to their research on the nexus between soft power, communications and social psychology, actors that are motivated by a self-interested agenda are portrayed as less credible messengers (ibid., 414). They argued that US efforts to communicate with the Muslim world were ineffective and unproductive due to a lack of US credibility and self-interested motivations (i.e. US occupation of Iraq) which conflicted with Iraqi interests. Moreover, prisoner abuse scandals such as Abu Ghraib further alienated Iraqi hearts and minds limiting the effectiveness of counter-terrorism operations. In sum, credibility and legitimacy are central to the exercise of soft power. As noted, a state’s means, even if they are ‘soft’, can still delegitimise and undermine its national objectives. This phenomenon was observed during the US-led war in Iraq when Donald Rumsfeld admitted he wished the US had focused more on ‘winning hearts and minds’ in Iraq to fight the propaganda war (Nye, 2011, p.24).

### 2.3 American exceptionalism and hegemony

Central to this study of Anglo-American relations is examining the asymmetrical nature of the alliance, in which the US has typically acted as the more dominant, and at times, hegemonic partner to the UK. Since the late 1990s, the US has been described as the global hegemon and lone superpower (Joffe, 2006); American global pre-eminence was viewed as having reached stratospheric proportions, to a degree unparalleled in human history (Dumbrell and Schafer, 2009, p1). This has had significant implications for America’s allies who have adapted to the realities of American global power; in response, junior partners have often resorted to behaviours such as hedging, rebalancing and bandwagoning. As such, this next section briefly examines the concept of US hegemony, as it relates to the politics of the US-UK alliance. Moreover, it is useful to examine the

concept of US hegemony as it relates to American exceptionalism as this guided the Bush administration's foreign policy behaviour, specifically its pursuit of unilateralism in Afghanistan and Iraq (Nayak and Malone, 2009).

For the purposes of this research, Seymour Lipset's (1966) definition of American exceptionalism will be used: "Exceptionalism holds that the United States has a unique place in history, differing fundamentally and qualitatively from all other countries; it also emphasises a 'God-given destiny' to guide the rest of the world according to the mainstream US political, social and economic worldview" (Nayak and Malone, 2009, p.254). At its core, American exceptionalism is the belief that the US is unique and is driven by a providential mission to transform the rest of the world in its image (Lipset, 1996; Adas, 2001; Nayak and Malone, 2009). The roots of American exceptionalism run deep and have been woven throughout the historical and cultural fabric of American foreign policy since the nation's founding in 1776. As an idea, it can trace its origins back to John Winthrop's (1630) 'City on a Hill' Puritan philosophy; to the interventionist doctrine of Manifest Destiny; and to Teddy Roosevelt's implementation of the 'Big Stick' policy to justify American interference in Latin America and the Caribbean (Hoff, 2007). Wilson's liberal interventionism and the Bush administration's 9/11 Commission Report, which propagated the 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric in fighting international terrorism, also revealed undertones of American exceptionalism (Agathangelou and Ling, 2005).

Robert Kagan and William Kristol (1996, p.270) have claimed that US hegemony is necessary to preserve the international order and argued: "The appropriate goal of American foreign policy…is to preserve that hegemony as far into the future as possible". Their theory about the divine nature of American unilateralism evokes elements of Nyean soft power: "American involvement in world affairs – be it military intervention or humanitarian intervention – is tied to a moral imperative derived from a providential

mission" (Nayak and Malone, 2009, p.270). Through the spreading of democratic ideals, the US is seen as fulfilling its ordained destiny. This kind of 'soft' power, however, could be interpreted as just another expression of hegemony, as the proliferation of American values and culture through force, not attraction, is another exercise of hard power.

David Wilkinson refuted the notion of the US as a hegemon; instead, he argued that the world system has been primarily defined by "unipolarity without hegemony" (1999, p.142). Wilkinson explained the limits of American superpower influence by distinguishing between strength and mastery. Wilkinson concluded that the US has wielded unparalleled strength without mastery over others. His theory of unipolarity without hegemony also reinforces Michael Cox's argument about American dominance. Cox (2005, p.208) claimed that the transatlantic divide between the US and its European partners, such as Britain, ultimately reflected "an American inability to do what all successful hegemons have been able to do in the past, which is to get those who are supposed to fall within their sphere of influence to follow their lead".

Proponents of American hegemony (Liska, 1967; Krauthammer, 1990; Huntington, 1996) have posited that US leadership has been an accepted yet tolerated structure to maintain and to secure the global political system. The late Charles Krauthammer (1990) previously argued that the emergence of the new strategic environment in the post-Cold War era, marked by the proliferation of WMDs and other transnational threats, required a unipolar superpower to take charge to provide security and stability against these threats. Alan Cafruny and Magnus Ryner (2007) also argued that US hegemony has been so deeply entrenched in the post-war economic system that other states with hegemonic potential have simply been incapable of competing with US supremacy. Moreover, dominant states, such as the US, have shaped outcomes for less powerful states, which have disproportionately benefited the interests of the hegemon, without substantial

opposition (Keaney, 2001, pp.164-164). Others like Michael Mastanduno (2005) asserted that the US hegemonic strategic approach would prove problematic in the future, especially in a post-9/11 world characterised by the emergence of international terrorism. What remains clear is that the prominent feature of the post-9/11 political landscape has been the disproportionate power exercised by the United States.

As this chapter has explored, the study of power within international relations has often revealed a top-down approach to power exercised by the hegemon. Moreover, a significant portion of the literature has taken a US-centric approach to understanding the nature of power. More research is needed within the literature to examine the role of power from the perspective of the 'junior partner' within the Anglo-American alliance. As such, this thesis will examine the projections and limitations of British power within its bilateral relationship with the US. Despite living in the shadow of American dominance, Britain too boasts of an impressive power arsenal: the world's fifth largest economy, a leading intelligence service and effective cultural diplomacy. The UK has continuously endeavoured to influence the preferences and policies of its stronger partner despite its junior role within the Anglo-American alliance. No longer the global power it used to be, Britain has had to employ new tools to project and to sustain power – smart power tools. Before exploring the concept of smart power, it is important to examine Britain's status within the Anglo-American alliance.

### 2.4 Great Britain as a Global Middle Power

In international relations, a middle power is a state that is not considered a great power or a small power, yet it still wields large amounts of influence and recognition within the international political system. Specifically, middle powers "demonstrate a propensity to promote cohesion and stability in the world system" (Jordaan, 2003, p.165).

The concept of middle powers was first developed in 16th century Italy by Renaissance philosopher, Giovanni Botero, to explain the foreign policy behaviours of papal states who found themselves in the middle of inter-state conflict. After the Second World War, Canada and Australia further developed the concept in both theory and practice defining middle powers as “countries that actively labour to uphold and promote global legal standards and thus contribute to a stable world order” (Oosterveld and Torossian, 2018/19, p.3). While middle powers are not expected to bear the brunt of responsibility in the same way as great powers, due to their economic and military strength they possess enough influence to conduct a normative foreign policy that not only promotes their own self-interests but also the interests of the wider international community. Thus, some scholars have argued that middle powers are in a uniquely privileged position within the world system (ibid).

There is much disagreement amongst scholars about what constitutes a middle power as the parameters are relatively undeveloped within the academic community (Oosterveld and Torossian, 2018/19, p.3). There are three primary theoretical approaches that dominate the literature: hierarchical/positional, behavioural and functional (Chappnick, 1999, pp.73-82). According to the former approach, middle powers are ranked according to their objective power resources such as military prowess (Wright, 1978) or their demographic and economic capabilities (Flemes, 2007, p.8). The latter approach defines middle powers as regional middle powers that influence specific geographic areas (Holbraad, 1971, p.81). Most scholars, however, employ the middle approach which categorises middle powers based upon their foreign policy behaviour rather than their material resources (Flemes, 2007, p.8). For example, Cooper, Higgott and Nossal (1993, p.19) argue that middle powers engage in ‘middlepowermanship’ defined as: “the tendency to pursue multilateral solutions to international problems, the tendency to

embrace compromise positions in international disputes, and the tendency to embrace notions of good international citizenship to guide diplomacy”. According to this behavioural definition, middle powers are defined by performing certain roles, such as displaying leadership on certain global problems and committing to orderliness, security and multilateral cooperation within the international political system (Jordaan, 2003, p.166). As Jordaan explains, middle power states are activists and often engage in global issues beyond their immediate concern (ibid., p.167).

One of the primary behaviours of middle powers is middle power diplomacy, defined as multilateral cooperation of like-minded actors with shared attitudes and values. As Keohane explains: “A middle-power is a state whose leaders consider that it cannot act alone effectively but may be able to have a systemic impact in a small group or through an international institution” (1969, p.296). Thus, middle powers often project influence through global institutions to assert their own national interests; Barnett and Duvall refer to this as ‘institutional power’ (2005, pp.51-52). While middle powers may not be considered great powers, they are still capable of exercising considerable international influence. Because middle powers lack the ability to affect global structural change unilaterally, their interests are often best served through international institutions, which in turn, provide greater legitimacy to the normative agreements that those middle powers have helped establish and perpetuate through these organisations (Jordaan, 2003, p.169).

Another key behaviour of middle powers is pursuing alliances with great powers to maximise opportunities and to gain influence in the international system (Rothstein, 1968). Some of these strategies include hedging, soft balancing and bandwagoning (Walt, 2009, p.107). Before explaining these strategies, it should be noted that pursuing alliances with great powers can pose potential security risks for middle powers: abandonment (the fear of being left amidst a crisis) and entrapment (being dragged into their allies’ commitments).

Often fear of the former leads to the occurrence of the latter. In other words, states that fear abandonment are less influential over their allies' policies and thus are more likely to undergo entrapment; while states that resist entrapment (i.e. European countries refusing to join the US coalition in Iraq) may fear that their allies will lose confidence in them and seek out more dependable partners (ibid., p.90).

Hedging provides a solution for middle powers who fear abandonment by a great power. Ciorciari and Haacke (2019, p.367) argue that hedging enables middle powers to possess some form of insurance against a hegemonic great power by pursuing two contradictory policy directions simultaneously: balancing (strong military presence and building up alliances) and engagement (trade agreements and multilateralism). Unlike other strategies, hedging permits middle powers to engage with a great power economically and diplomatically while also providing fallback security measures as a form of insurance (ibid., p.368).

Sometimes middle powers also engage in soft balancing whereby the primary objective is to limit a great power's influence (Walt, 2009, p.104). Unlike hard balancing, which seeks to change the status quo within the international system, soft balancing accepts the balance of power but seeks to obtain more desirable outcomes by creating a coalition designed to constrain specific policies of the hegemon (ibid.). Another main objective of this strategy is to coerce the great power to adjust its policies that align with those of the balancers. One might argue that soft balancing is reminiscent of Lukes' (1974) third face of power: the manipulation of another's desires and preferences.

Middle powers who pursue bandwagoning align themselves with a great power because the costs of noncompliance are deemed to be higher than alignment (Walt, 2009, pp.108, 115). Some have regarded bandwagoning as a form of appeasement (ibid., p.80);

while others have described it as a "strategy of the weak that gives into the enemy" (Mowle and Saacko, 2007, p.69). By contrast, Randall Schweller (1994) argued that bandwagoning can be employed by middle powers for the purpose of profit rather than survival. This argument provides one explanation for the intra-alliance behaviour between the UK and US specifically how bilateral cooperation with Washington, albeit asymmetrical, has served British national interests.

The literature is divided about whether the UK is classified as a great power or a middle power. Using a resource-based framework, it is understandable why some scholars have chosen the former category. According to Kenneth Waltz (1979, p.131), there are five essential criteria that characterise great powers: population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, political stability and competence, and military strength. Great powers "command an especially large share of the resources or capabilities that can be used by states to achieve their ends" (Ikenberry, Mastanduno and Wohlforth, 2009, p.4). Furthermore, their influence "reaches across the world with global consequences for other countries" (Ogden, 2020). Nevertheless, power is about more than sheer military might. As mentioned, power is also relational, and relationships can act as a source of power (Long, 2017a, pp.196-197). Moreover, as Nye stated, evidence of power "lies not in resources but in the ability to change the behaviour of [other] states" (1990, p.155).

With the UK currently ranked as having the fifth largest economy in the world (this has likely decreased post-Brexit), holding a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and making up one of the nine declared powers possessing nuclear weapons; it would seem perplexing to categorise the UK as a middle power especially when the list also includes countries like Japan (a non-nuclear power), Israel (a small but highly developed country with a suspected nuclear weapons capability) and Mexico (a large, developing country). Although dominant middle powers possess ample soft power, it is the

UK's smart power capabilities - cultural diplomacy, world-leading financial power and a robust legal system - that differentiate it from other middle powers and thus puts it in its own unique sub-category. More specifically, it is Britain's exercise of normative power through international forums that underscore its status as a Global Middle Power. Britain's diplomacy, largely rooted in a long-standing tradition of humanitarian interventionism (Newman, 2021, p.2), has greatly contributed to the forming of the country's national role conception as a Global Middle Power whose role is to promote international order through coalition-building, to mediate in inter-state conflict and to help facilitate peacekeeping activities (Cox, 1997). This thesis, however, is not interested in examining the UK's status within the international system as a whole but rather, its power relative to the US, a great power. As such, it positions the UK as a Global Middle Power within the context of an asymmetrical and bilateral relationship with the US.

### 2.5 Key debates on smart power

Partly in response to the Bush administration's over-reliance upon coercive military force following 9/11, combined with the recognition that a 'softer' approach was needed, the US and UK governments worked to combine hard and soft power responses to achieve their strategic objectives in CA + MENA. This integration of hard and soft power resources into one effective and integrated strategy has been termed smart power (Nye and Armitage, 2007). Before taking up her appointment as Secretary of State in 2009, Hilary Clinton presented smart power, "using all the tools of power in concert" (Hertzberg, 2009), as the new strategy that would guide US foreign policy (Koutsardi, 2017, p.73), making the Obama White House the first US administration to adopt a foreign policy approach based on smart power (Gallarotti, 2015, p.245). This 'smart' power approach claims that governments can best achieve their objectives by supplementing hard power with soft power. Moreover, a 'smart' power approach emphasises a "strong military", but also the

need to "invest heavily in alliances, partnerships and institutions of all levels to expand one's influence…" (Nye and Armitage, 2007, p.7).

According to Suzanne Nossel (2004), who first coined the term smart power in an influential article published in *Foreign Affairs*, a 'smart' foreign policy strategy recognises that both military might and humanitarian action can be mutually reinforcing. Crucially, Nossel reframed smart power as "knowing that the United States' own hand is not always its best tool" and that a state's interests can be furthered "by enlisting others on behalf of its goals, through alliances, international institutions careful diplomacy, and the power of ideals" (Nossel, 2004, p.138). As a result of the Bush administration's unilateral and militarist policies in Afghanistan and Iraq, Nossel advocated for a renewal of soft power tools (free trade, diplomacy, foreign aid and American values) to rebuild a more stable and secure world order as well as to re-build to America's deteriorating reputation post-Iraq. In practice, US foreign policy based on Nossel's conception of smart power does not emphasise purely military force, or hard power, but instead "engages a broad range of tools of statecraft, such as diplomacy, foreign aid, private sector engagement as well as military intervention" (Nossel, 2017).

Joseph Nye, whose work on soft power has been extensively explored in this chapter, has been credited for further developing Nossel's conception of smart power. Nye developed the term to counter the misconception that "soft power alone could produce effective foreign policy" (2023, p.63), and argued that 'smart' strategies combine both hard and soft power tools. For instance, soft power alone cannot address the issue of terrorism: "US soft power got nowhere in drawing the Taliban government away from al Qaeda in the 1990s but it took hard military power in 2001 to end that alliance" (ibid.). Hard power, however, also has its limitations. As Nye put it, milieu goals such as democracy promotion, advancing human rights are "not best handled with guns" (ibid.).

Figuring out how to integrate both hard and soft power into one foreign policy strategy is what Nye has called 'contextual intelligence' (Nye, 2009, p.161); employing only hard power or soft power would be ineffective. Thus, contextual intelligence helps decisionmakers and officials align their tactics with objectives to create smart strategies (Nye, 2023, p.64). As Nye has highlighted, the Bush administration's adoption of the pre-emptive war doctrine, coercive democratisation and militant unilateralism illustrated a lack of smart power in its foreign policy post-9/11 (ibid., p.65). To tackle global threats, such as global terrorism, military power may encompass part of the response, but utilising soft power resources is necessary to 'win hearts and minds' on the ground.

Like Nye and Nossel, American scholar Ernest J. Wilson advocated for greater prominence of smart power in US foreign policy after the Bush administration's interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Wilson defined smart power as "the capacity of an actor to combine elements of hard power and soft power in ways that are mutually reinforcing such that the actor's purposes are advanced effectively and efficiently" (2008, p.115). According to Wilson, deploying a smart foreign policy is not defined by the reluctance to use hard power resources, nor is it an over-reliance on soft power capabilities; instead, using smart power effectively is knowing the strengths and limitations of each instrument of power. Moreover, it is knowing how and when to combine coercive and soft power to persuade and to inspire emulation (ibid., p. 116).

Gray (2011, p.v) contested these findings on smart power, arguing that hard and soft power cannot be compared or used interchangeably as they do not possess equivalent weight or effectiveness. On the one hand, while soft power is deemed a more attractive alternative to hard power; Gray argued that "soft power does not lend itself readily to strategic direction" (ibid., p.29). This is comparable to Stefano Guzzini's theory about the complementary relationship between hard and soft power. He argues that power is neither

replaceable nor interchangeable and recognises that resources in one capacity may not be appropriate in another (2005, p.514). In line with Nossel's and Wilson's argument, however, Gallarotti argued that the greatest influence a state can have is obtained through a diversification of both soft and hard power resources (2015, p.277).

To conclude, this study on the nature and exercise of power has reviewed the literature on hard power, which scholars have equated with tangible resources and physical tools, and soft power, described as intangible resources such as culture, political values and foreign policies (Nye, 2008, p.96). The main distinction between these two instruments of power, however, is not contingent upon their tangibility and ability to be measured but rather upon the context of their use. This point, in particular, is central to this examination of smart power within the context of the Anglo-American alliance.

As noted, most of the literature on smart power is US-centric but this thesis maintains that the concept of smart power is by no means limited to the US and can be used for analysis, in particular, to examine how the UK has sought to influence US policy in CA + MENA post-9/11. Moreover, using smart power in this analysis will provide a more nuanced understanding of the US-UK relationship from a British perspective, that is more than just about the exercise of hard power. Underpinned by values of universal appeal (individual freedom, respect and justice), the UK possesses all the repertoire of smart power: a world leader in cultural diplomacy, a historical record of providing humanitarian aid to areas affected by man-made and natural disasters; a maritime nation with the fifth largest defence expenditure (Allison, 2021); and an economy that is ranked in the top ten strongest globally. Britain's challenge has been how to best manoeuvre these smart tools to act in concert with one another to achieve desired national outcomes, such as promoting international security in Afghanistan and Iraq and managing disorder in the MENA region**.**

### 2.6 Smart power: A framework for analysis

This final section will outline the analytical framework of smart power which this thesis uses to answer the core research question: *how did the UK influence US intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria between 2001-2013?* This thesis uses the concept of smart power, defined as the combination of hard and soft power tools into one effective strategy (Nye, 2011, p.23) and the ability to influence and frame another's agendas, to reconceptualise the special relationship. Central to this study of AAR is the recognition that the exercise of smart power is also determined by the personalities and decision-makers who wield it. While the focus of this thesis is examining state-to-state relations, ultimately power is exercised by individuals. Thus, the politics of personality is intrinsic to the exercise of smart power. As such, this thesis examines the relationships between key decision-makers in London and Washington to understand how British policy elites have understood their national roles and the centrality of maintaining Britain's special relationship with the US in order to project British influence. The literature on smart power, however, faces limitations as it does not account for relations between policy elites. Building on the work of Nossel, Nye and Wilson, this thesis also conceives of smart power as a manifestation of how British policy elites have viewed Britain's role and how they have embodied and executed that within its special relationship with the US. To that end, the researcher draws on the concept of national role conceptions (NRC) to emphasise the importance of the personal relationships between policy elites within the Anglo-American alliance.

National roles are used in the study of foreign affairs to describe the "behaviours, identities or status positions" of state actors (Gaskarth, 2014, p.561). The concept of NRCs was first introduced by Kalevi Holsti (1970) who, having adapted the concept from social psychologists, argued that states play particular roles based on "ideas that states hold about

their proper place in international affairs" (Strong, 2018, 374). According to Holsti, states exist within a system of "role prescriptions", originating from both domestic pressures and international expectations, that both shape the state's "national role conception" and determine its "attitudes, decisions and actions", or what Holsti calls, its "role performance" (Holsti, 1970, pp.239-240). Based on this definition, some scholars, like Naomi Wish, have suggested that a state's foreign policy behaviour is the "product of its national capabilities attributes" (Wish, 1987, p.96), and is therefore structurally determined. According to Harnisch (2012), national roles emerge from the interaction between "ego conceptions", through which a state defines a role for itself, and "alter expectations", through which a state's counterparts create roles for it to take (Strong, 2018, p.374). By contrast, David McCourt (2011) argues that identities are derived from egos, and how states perceive themselves.

This thesis does not seek to examine the vast literature on role theory and its approach to foreign policy analysis; however, it does recognise that national role conceptions affect a state's foreign policymaking behaviour. Crucially, for this study on AAR, this thesis highlights how national roles operate as "a conceptual map" which policy elites employ to understand and to navigate global affairs (Shih, 1988, p.600). Understanding Britain's national roles can explain how and why British policy elites have pursued certain foreign policies and behaviours vis-à-vis the US in the Middle East post-9/11.

Within the literature on role theory, efforts have been made by scholars to develop a classification of national roles; for example, Holsti listed seventeen potential role types.[3]

[3] Holsti's seventeen role types include: bastion of revolution-liberator; regional leader; regional protector; active independent; liberator supporter; anti-imperialist agent; defender of the faith; mediator-integrator; regional-subsystem collaborator; developer; faithful ally; independent; bridge; example; internal development; isolate and protectee (1970, p.286).

For this analysis of AAR and British smart power, this thesis draws on two of Holsti's role types: the 'faithful ally', defined as a state who "makes a specific commitment to support the policies of another" (1970, p.267), and the 'bridge', defined as a state who acts as a "translator or conveyor of messages and information between peoples of different cultures" (ibid., p.266). Holsti argued that policy elites conceive of their state playing different roles in "separate issue areas, geographical regions or sets of relationships" (ibid., p.253), thus it is possible for states to hold multiple roles simultaneously depending on the context. The UK has played various foreign policy roles, specifically in its relationship with the US; something that will be explored more in this thesis. For example, the UK has acted both as the 'transatlantic bridge' between the US and Europe and as America's 'first ally', specifically during the Bush-Blair years.

As role theory has progressed, scholars have developed frameworks to understand how role conceptions can be used to trace the process of policymaking. Building on Holsti's work, James Gaskarth outlined six role orientations that the UK has adopted to achieve foreign policy goals.[4] According to Gaskarth, 'role orientations' describe how states orient themselves towards other states in the international system; he argues that these roles are shaped by domestic pressures and the expectations of other states and external actors (2014, pp.561-562). Gaskarth's work on role orientations is useful and relevant to this study on Anglo-American intervention and the role of British influence, especially as the UK has, at times, pursued different role orientations towards the US to achieve foreign policy goals with varying degrees of success.

As such, in addition to the roles, 'faithful ally' and the 'bridge', this thesis draws on two of Gaskarth's role orientations in its analysis of British smart power and Anglo-

[4] Gaskarth's six role orientations include: isolate, regional partner, influential rule of law state, thought leader, opportunist interventionist and Great power (2014, pp.566-579).

American relations: the ‘influential rule of law state’ and the ‘opportunist-interventionist’. The ‘influential rule of law state’ views the UK as an influential power and emphasises Britain’s role in upholding international law, whilst an ‘opportunist-interventionist’ Britain “exploits current disruptions in the international system to advance liberal ideas about human rights, democracy and good governance” (ibid., p.561, 577); New Labour’s Tony Blair springs to mind. Additionally, it is worth noting that, amongst his six role orientations, Gaskarth has also included the ‘Great Power’, defined as a state that makes alliances and competes with other states to ensure relative gains (ibid., p.579). Arguably, the UK has still endeavoured to perform this role despite the loss of its empire; this has been especially true in the Middle East where the US eclipsed British power post-Cold War. As noted, however, this thesis classifies the UK as a Global Middle Power and not a great power, thus the ‘Great Power’ role orientation will not be incorporated. However, this framework does draw on the notion of Britain as a Global Middle Power whose responsibilities mirror those of a great power, including leading on global issues, mediating inter-state conflict and facilitating peacekeeping operations. In sum, building upon the work of Holsti and Gaskarth, this thesis uses the concept of national role conceptions to enhance the theory of smart power.

This smart power framework hinges on the following four assertions:

1) That smart power consists of both hard and soft power tools which are distinct yet complementary. Military action, coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions comprise hard power tools whilst soft power tools include liberal values and foreign policies, humanitarian aid, collective cooperation and multilateralism. The complementarian nature of smart power means that states can combine elements of hard power and soft power in ways that are mutually

reinforcing such that the state's purposes are advanced effectively (Wilson, 2008, p.115; Nye, 2011, p.23).

2) That smart power is contextual. Knowing how and when to use hard or soft power depends on opportunity and situational context. Using smart power effectively is discerning the strengths and limitations of each instrument of power, and recognising which tools are best suited under certain circumstances (Wilson, 2008, p.116).

3) That using smart power effectively is recognising that, in certain contexts, a state's own hand is not always its best tool. A state's interests can be furthered by enlisting others on behalf of its national goals, through alliances, international institutions and diplomacy (Nossel, 2004, p.138).

4) That the politics of personality is key to the application of smart power. Exercising smart power is determined by the individual decision-makers who wield it, and it is informed by their own conceptions about their country's national roles in the international system. Thus, this thesis also understands smart power as a manifestation of how policy elites understand their country's NRC and how that informs their state's foreign policy behaviour and interactions with other states.

Applying this smart power framework, this thesis explores the projections and limitations of British influence on US foreign policy in CA + MENA by examining four case studies of Anglo-American military intervention from 2001 to 2013: Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. As noted, each case will apply this analytical framework to examine how the UK exercised smart power by examining the following: the complementarity and integration of hard and soft power tools; the role of context in the implementation of smart

power; how the UK's perception of the 'special relationship' was utilised to exercise power in the region; and the role of personal relations and individual leader's national role conceptions. Ultimately, this framework will be tested against four cases of Anglo-American intervention to determine whether the UK was successful in influencing US intervention. The 2001 intervention of Afghanistan by American and British forces, following the terrorist attacks against the US on September 11, 2001 is where this thesis now turns.

## Chapter 3. Afghanistan

*"America has no truer friend than Great Britain. Once again, we are joined together in a great cause."* (President George W. Bush, 2001d)

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will seek to test the analytical framework of smart power against the first of four cases of Anglo-American intervention post-9/11 to understand how the UK sought to influence US policy in Central Asia. The war in Afghanistan was launched in October 2001, by the US, the UK and a coalition of allies in response to the four coordinated terrorist attacks carried out by the militant Islamist extremist network al-Qaeda against the United States on September 11, 2001, which claimed the lives of 2,977 individuals, including 67 British nationals (Cacciottolo, 2011). Next to the US, the country that sustained the most casualties on 9/11 was the UK. This chapter will explore how London, under the leadership of Prime Minister Tony Blair, used smart power by shaping and framing the agenda in Washington. It is worth reiterating that this research solely focuses on the period leading up to, as well as the initial stages of, Anglo-American intervention in Afghanistan. As such, the operations, tactics and strategic outcomes during the 20-year war, including the disastrous US-led withdrawal in 2021, albeit worthy of further study, are not discussed in this research.

The chapter begins with a short synopsis of the background to the war, including the tragic events of 9/11, followed by an examination of the UK's role in the US-led 'war on terror' and invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. Applying the analytical framework, this chapter will seek to reconceptualise the 'special relationship' by examining how the UK exercised smart power in Afghanistan by inspecting the following: whether British intervention was complementarian; if regional contexts were a factor in the

UK's efforts to influence US policy; how the UK utilised its perception of the 'special relationship' with the US to advance its interests; and the role that the politics of personal relations played in the UK's ability to project influence.

### 3.2 The day that shook the world

The United States' and Great Britain's military intervention of Afghanistan was almost pre-ordained when on September 11$^{th}$ 2001, four commercial airliners in the United States were hijacked by members of the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation. Two planes were flown into the World Trade Centre, causing both towers to collapse, and a third was crashed into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the US Department of Defence and symbol of American military power. A fourth plane United Airlines 93, which US officials believed was destined for Washington, D.C., crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania due to the bravery of passengers who stormed the cockpit. In total, 3,000 people were killed. In the hours and days following the attacks, US national security and intelligence services worked to determine who was likely responsible. Two names had been mentioned on the day of the attacks: Osama bin Laden, a multi-millionaire from a wealthy Saudi-Yemeni family who had previously been associated with the Afghan-Arabs who fought against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1970s and 1980s (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004, p.55) and the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation, which had established a headquarters in Afghanistan following the Soviet withdrawal in 1988 (ibid., p.56).

Standing before rescue workers and surrounded by the rubble on Ground Zero in New York City, the newly elected US President George W. Bush delivered one of the most pivotal speeches of his presidency through a megaphone: "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked down these buildings will hear all of us

soon" (Bush, 2001c). In an unscripted moment of national fervour, the US President made his first declaration of America's 'War on Terror', which subsequentially led to the invasions of Afghanistan in October 2001 and Iraq in March 2003. President Bush's 'bullhorn moment' foreshadowed America's reengagement in the Middle East since its last significant military campaign in the 1990-91 Gulf War when a US-led coalition ousted Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

In a televised address to the American people, the US President stated: "America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world" (Bush, 2001a). Bush's messianic address echoed a core theme that would guide future US foreign policy: the idea that America was 'exceptional', and its intrinsic specialness lent itself to becoming both the target and victim of mass atrocities committed by a new kind of security threat, international terrorism. As Bush declared: "The only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it" (Bush, 2001e).

Thus, to protect the American "way of life" and "to defend freedom and all that is just in the world" (Bush, 2001a), the US launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), a collective offensive against the Taliban government in Afghanistan, on October 7, 2001, barely one month after the 9/11 attacks. This followed after NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time in its history, which states that "an armed attack against one or more of the Allies in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002b). This provided US allies, specifically the UK, legal cover to launch operations in Afghanistan with the US. Alongside British forces and the Afghan United Front (Northern Alliance), the end state of OEF was three-fold: to destroy al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban regime from power, to deny the use of Afghanistan as a safe haven for terrorists and to set the precedent that any nation that harboured terrorists would be punished severely (Rumsfeld, 2001). By November 2001,

the Taliban regime had fallen, and a new Afghan transitional government was formed following an international agreement reached in Bonn on December 5, 2001 (Hasan, 2014, p.2). The Bonn agreement provided for a UN-mandated international peacekeeping force, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to maintain security in Kabul (Katzman, 2004, p.22) and to build capacity for state infrastructure (Mumford, 2017, p.181). In November 2003, ISAF was put under NATO command to absolve member countries from volunteering to lead the force (Katzman, 2004, p.22).

### 3.3 The UK's role in the 'war on terror' and Afghanistan

The 9/11 terrorist attacks "rescued Bush's government from a loss of purpose", argued Sir Christopher Meyer (2005, p.183), who served as the UK ambassador to the United States from 1997 to 2003. The US, which, as the late Charles Krauthammer noted, had enjoyed its "unipolar moment" during the 1990s (1990, p.23), began to see its role in the world differently following the national tragedy of September 11 (Wertheim, 2021). This renewed sense of purpose was also shared by its British ally who saw itself as playing a fundamental role in the global war on terror (GWOT). As Prime Minister Tony Blair declared to the British people on the eve of the invasion of Afghanistan: "9/11 was an attack on our freedom, our way of life and civilised values" (Blair, 2001). For Blair, the international community had a responsibility to tackle the issue of global terrorism, specifically by overthrowing the Taliban government in Afghanistan who had supported terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda who carried out the 9/11 attacks.

This belief stemmed from the "doctrine of international community" (Blair, 1999), which Blair first outlined in his 1999 Chicago speech. Influenced by discussions with British historian and strategist, Lawrence Freedman, Blair's speech outlined five conditions or 'tests' for legitimate intervention, thus capturing his vision of Britain's

*modus operandi* for intervention. Blair called for the UK to pursue a more 'ethical' foreign policy, characterised by mediating inter-state conflict, delivering humanitarian aid and facilitating peacekeeping operations. Afghanistan demonstrated a convergence between Blair's 'ethical' foreign policy and his call for the international community to join the fight against global terrorism.

Up to this point, Blair had presided over a string of relatively successful small to medium-scale British military operations during his premiership – Iraq in 1998, Kosovo in 1999 and Sierra Leone in 2000 (Hasan, 2014, p.5). According to one senior British military officer, "Tony Blair seemed to be of the view that you could throw the military at a problem, and…there will be some form of resolution even if you didn't really fully understand the problem".[5] Interviews with members of the British military highlight a dissatisfaction with Blair's perception of viewing the military as an instrument for humanitarian intervention. What Afghanistan demonstrated was that 9/11 changed Blair's initial "willingness to embark on military interventions on humanitarian grounds" and that it would become "more associated with intervention on behalf of security and counter-terrorism" (Scott, 2016, p.257-258). In any case, this reflected Blair's willingness to enact Britain's role as an 'opportunist-interventionist' power.

Unlike previous operations in Kosovo and Sierra Leone, however, the UK did not take the lead in Afghanistan. Instead, Britain played a supporting role to its Atlantic ally, the United States, who, despite sharing common goals and strategic objectives, pursued its own agenda. The Bush administration's policy in Afghanistan was largely driven by the desire for revenge. There was little appetite within the administration to transform Afghanistan into a Western liberal democracy sympathetic to American values and

[5] Interview with retired senior British Army officer, Spring 2022, name and location anonymised to protect the individual's identity.

interests; it was hoped that NATO would assume this responsibility. This conflict of approach to intervention in Afghanistan will be discussed later in this chapter.

Britain's role as the junior coalition partner was merely a continuation of the strategic norm first established in the post-Cold War world, as demonstrated in the 1990-91 Gulf War (Mumford, 2017, p.173). After the 1956 Suez crisis, the UK viewed the special relationship as a way to gain influence over US decision-making (Dumani, 2016). "This reification of the 'special relationship' was to some degree deliberately fostered by elites in the UK who saw a strong and permanent junior partnership with the US as the best way to manage and finesse British international decline" (Dumbrell, 2004, p.438).

Despite its junior partner status within the relationship, Washington still considered London to be its leading ally in the GWOT. In particular, British military resources helped share some of the burden of America's combat and peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan (Archick, 2005). At a joint press conference in Washington, D.C., shortly after the launch of OEF, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair outlined their plan for operations in Afghanistan (The White House, 2001b). In terms of traditional hard power, the US provided the bulk of force and leadership in Operation Enduring Freedom (Blair, 2001). However, the UK continued to provide support and assistance to the Northern Alliance,[6] a loose coalition of militias in Afghanistan who opposed the Taliban regime from 1996 to the US' overthrow of the regime in 2001 (US Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 1999) as well as to destroy al-Qaeda training camps and Taliban military infrastructure (Blair, 2001). Additionally, following NATO's creation of ISAF in 2001, backed by UN support, around 1,700 British troops were deployed to work alongside NATO allies by April 2002 and to facilitate peacekeeping operations (National

[6] The Northern Alliance, formerly known as the National Islamic United Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, was first established in 1992 in opposition to the communist government led by President Najibullah.

Army Museum, 2022). As General Sir John McColl, who led ISAF in 2002 after the fall of the Taliban, stated during an interview:

> We went in there to provide security to allow the other aspects of government to gain traction…We deployed to Kabul to give Karzai's government security and to allow them to develop these elements of the campaign – political infrastructure, sound economics, rule of law, justice, free media - in the long term to deliver success.[7]

However, as Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, UK Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2007 to 2009, opined: "Despite being by far the biggest contributor, we [Britain] were very much the junior partners. It was all within the American machine, and we were treated with little real respect."[8]

This thesis suggests it was Britain's soft power contribution to OEF, rather than its military capability alone, that was more significant. Some within the British government, for example, argued that it was vital that OEF was not seen as a form of "US imperialism and the sole venture by a super-power" (HL Deb 5 November 2001, c.27). Thus, what British power lacked in military hardware and troop numbers, it made up for it by providing legitimacy. Just as the UK valued its relationship with the US to protect its own national interests in a post-9/11 world, so the US equally valued the transatlantic alliance to acquire a British 'seal of approval' for its own intervention. When the UK deployed to Afghanistan in 2001, it was the fourth time in almost 200 years that British forces had attempted to shape its political and social order (Ledwidge, 2011, p.67). Named the 'graveyard of empires', Afghanistan's memory of previous imperial powers did not bode well for British forces in 2001 and the two decades that followed.

### 3.4 Complementarity in Afghanistan

[7] Interview with General Sir John McColl, iPhone, 4 April 2022.
[8] Interview Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, London, 13 April 2022.

### 3.41 Bush's 'Americanism' versus Blair's doctrine of international community

Using the smart power framework, two key insights have emerged about Britain's endeavours to integrate hard and soft power tools into one smart power strategy. Firstly, the US and UK pursued divergent approaches, unilateralism and multilateralism, respectively, with the Blair government urging the Bush administration to build an international coalition in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. September 11 changed the way the US understood its role within the international order, and thus can explain the diverging approaches to intervention within the Anglo-American alliance. The 9/11 terrorist attacks showed Washington that weak states or non-state actors posed a danger to American national interests (The White House, 2002, p.vi). As Bacevich stated: "9/11 had proved that the world's largest security apparatus had failed" (Bacevich, 2016, p.219). Before 9/11, terrorism was not an overriding national security concern for Washington. White House officials in the Clinton and Bush administrations had regarded a US invasion of Afghanistan as unthinkable prior to September 11.[9]

Given the location of the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration could easily justify intervention in defence of American national security. As such, "the uncertain multilateralism of Clinton was replaced with Bush's 'Americanism'" (Dumbrell, 2004, p.440) as the Bush administration used securitising language to justify intervention to protect American national interests and prevent another 9/11 in the future (Buzan, 2006; Fierke, 2007). US foreign policy now sought to use every element in its arsenal of power to exact revenge and to protect the American way of life (The White House, 2002, p.5). As Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, told reporters just one week after the crisis: "We have a choice either to change the way we live, which is unacceptable, or to change the

[9] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 22 July 2004, 'The 9/11 Commission Report'.

way that they live…" (Department of Defence, 2001a). Rumsfeld echoed the President's ultimatum to the world: "You're either with us, or you're with the terrorists" (Bush, 2001d). In America's 'war on terror', there was no room for neutrality; any state that harboured terrorists would be treated as a terrorist state by the US government (*9/11: Inside the President's War Room*, 2021).

The Bush Doctrine, which was later incorporated into the 2002 National Security Strategy, changed the way that the US sought to ensure its own national security (Fontenot et al., 2004, p.23). Largely driven by a neo-conservative agenda, it emphasised the primacy of American power, pre-emptive self-defence and unilateral action to promote democratic goals. This became the guiding doctrine of American foreign policy in Afghanistan and later Iraq. The GWOT essentially removed the limits on American military might by "unshackling US power" (Bacevich, 2016, p.222). Again, this was reflected in the 2002 US National Security Strategy: "The US will not hesitate to act alone if we need to although we will strive to enlist the support of the international community" (The White House, 2002, p.12).

By forsaking a multilateral approach to protect its national interests, however, the US was at risk of losing opportunities to protect those very interests (Gallarotti, 2004). In fact, not everyone within the Bush administration endorsed American unilateralism. US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, was an advocate of pursuing a collective approach in the GWOT: "Without cooperation from our partners, we will be unable to defeat terrorism" (Cox, 2005, p.220). Powell's tilt towards multilateralism reflected ideological divisions within Bush's inner circle. The Powell-Blair stance countered the more hawkish Cheney-Rumsfeld axis, and was seen as promoting a broad-based, multilateral approach to intervention (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002c).

Like Powell, Blair understood the importance of securing international support for Afghanistan. Blair recognised that for the US to win the 'war on terror', it would need to re-engage with its allies and to move towards a policy of multilateralism, much to the fury of Cheney and Rumsfeld. But as Sir David Manning, former foreign policy advisor to Tony Blair from 2001 to 2003, explained, pursuing multilateralism was not exclusively for America's benefit: "It's quite hard for a prime minister to behave with the degree of decisiveness in foreign and security policy…if international law breaks down, the UK is more vulnerable than the United States."[10]

London now sensed an opportunity to influence policy in Washington. Within days of September 11, Blair delivered a memo to Washington in which he made the case for a multilateral and collective response under the banner of NATO (Dumbrell, 2006, p.151). As rumours began to circulate about Iraq's potential involvement in the planning and execution of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Blair urged Bush to focus on the situation in Afghanistan, specifically eliminating al-Qaeda and deposing the Taliban regime (Lindsay, 2003, pp.102-107; Meyer, 2005, p.191). Combined with pressure from within, figures like Powell, as well as his father former President George H. W. Bush, who is thought to have advised his son to pursue a multilateral diplomatic approach towards the region (Manning, 2002), Blair was successful in his goal of encouraging Bush to pursue a multilateral intervention in Afghanistan. Both Washington and London agreed to secure UN support in condemning the 9/11 attacks as well as to obtain NATO military support for US action, thus providing a legal and political framework for military action. The Americans, however, were wary of European allies following the 1999 Kosovo conflict as the US military argued that NATO consultations compromised the effectiveness of military operations (Meyer, 2005, pp.191-192). In the build-up to OEF, Rumsfeld was quick to

[10] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.

remind US allies: "There will not be a single coalition as there was in the Gulf War…The mission needs to define the coalition, not the coalition defining the mission" (Department of Defence, 2001b).

In the twenty-six days between the 9/11 attacks and the launch of OEF, Washington and London planned joint operations with wide-ranging support from the UN, EU and NATO (Fiddes, 2020, p.106). The UN Security Council (UNSC) did not stand in the way of OEF (ibid., p.102) as military action was justified under the guise of the US' inherent right to individual as well as collective self-defence in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter (Smith and Thorp, 2010, pp.2-3). Before US-led military strikes commenced, the UK submitted a letter to the UNSC stating that its armed forces were engaged in operations against military targets in self-defence (Smith and Thorp, 2010). Seeking legitimacy for Anglo-American invasion into Afghanistan was never an issue of contention as the US and UK believed they had a solid legal basis for intervention despite not being granted official authorisation by the UNSC (Fiddes, 2020). As Lord Jay of Ewelme, who served as Permanent Under-Secretary at the FCO between 2002 and 2006, recounted: "In general, there was international feeling that there needed to be a response…there wasn't a conflict there."[11] But as the campaign's initial objectives evolved, so too did Britain's political willingness. As Cowper-Coles opined: "There was no doubt about the legal base. The big mistake was changing from going after al-Qaeda, the real terrorists…to trying to turn the country into a liberal democracy."[12] This viewpoint was equally shared by Meyer:

> We the Brits were experts in launching punitive expeditions against Afghanistan…what started to give me pause was when it morphed from a punitive

[11] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2022.
[12] Interview with Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, London, 13 April 2022.

> expedition into nation-building, bringing Western style democracy to a country that had barely known it. I thought, we're in trouble here.[13]

In addition to London's pressure on Washington towards a multilateral diplomatic approach, the UK's offer of substantial military support, which included intelligence, access to bases and deployment of special forces demonstrated Britain's hard power capabilities in Afghanistan. The UK placed its entire military capability at US disposal (Gerleman, et al., 2001, p.9), while simultaneously urging its ally to engage in numerous international political processes to achieve legitimate endorsement for intervention. This highlights Britain's "contextual intelligence" (Nye, 2009, p.161) in Afghanistan, the ability to combine hard power resources - defence cooperation and military assets - and soft power resources - multilateral diplomacy through institutions like UN and NATO - into one smart power strategy.

### 3.42 American over-reliance on hard power

Although the US and UK shared the common goals of protecting human rights and promoting democracy in Afghanistan, the Blair government achieved only partial success in steering American power as the Bush administration over-emphasised the use of hard power during OEF. On the one hand, the Bush administration provided some secondary justifications for intervention, stating that "this great nation is doing everything it can to move enormous amounts of food" to feed Afghan people while holding the Taliban to account (The White House, 2001c). Marrying the language of American hard power with the soft power of humanitarian assistance in the build-up to intervention would curtail concerns raised by those who condemned the conflict (Holland and Aaronson, 2014, p.11). For example, during the launch of OEF, President Bush informed the American people that the US military would drop both bombs and food parcels:

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[13] Interview with Sir Christopher Meyer, Zoom, 23 February 2022.

> At the same time, the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we'll also drop food, medicine and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and children of Afghanistan (Bush, 2001e).

Similarly, September 11 codified Blair's views on intervention, especially as it included a strong moral argument. As Hasan has noted, Britain's foreign policy in Afghanistan indicated a pursuit of the doctrine of 'ethical interventionism' that was grounded in the primacy of the Anglo-American alliance (2014, p.5). Elements of 'ethical interventionism' are seen in Blair's speech to Parliament one day after the launch of OEF:

> It is justice too that makes our coalition as important on the humanitarian side as on the military side. We have established an effective coalition to deal with the humanitarian crisis in the region, which of course existed before 11 September. Our priority has been to re-establish food supply routes into Afghanistan (HC Deb 8 October 2011, c.813).

Although he emphasised the three components of OEF - military, diplomatic and humanitarian (Blair, 2001) – being of equal importance, again, Blair was careful to highlight the humanitarian component in his justification for intervention in Afghanistan. As Blair stated: "The victory against the Taliban in Afghanistan wasn't just a military victory, it was a political victory. People in Afghanistan have been liberated from one of the most vile and oppressive regimes in the world" (Holland and Aaronson, 2014, p.10). Like Kosovo, Blair was strategic in his "rhetorical balancing" between the different arguments, to ensure that he could win over the British public (Holland and Aaronson, 2014).

Blair's worldview of interventionism was also heavily influenced by the notion that globalisation had eroded the distinction between domestic and foreign issues. As such, he saw intervention as essential to maintain the international order and to mitigate against emerging global threats, notably terrorism. This idea of global interconnectedness is reflected in his public address on the eve of OEF: "Even if no British citizen had died, we

would be right to act. This atrocity was an attack on us all…" (Blair, 2001). In interviews with UK government officials and British military leaders, Blair was described as an "internationalist"[14] and a "globalist"[15] whose "thinking was along global lines, not just national ones."[16] As these quotes suggest, Blair's understanding of global interconnectedness impacted his decision-making to commit the UK to join America's 'war on terror' and to deploy the instrument of military power.

In addition to Blair's 'softer' justifications for intervention, part of Blair's strategy in Afghanistan also included a massive public relations campaign to persuade British public opinion that international terrorism posed a threat to the UK's national security and that therefore, intervention was both a justified and appropriate response. As Blair stated before Parliament one day after the launch of OEF: "This military action we are undertaking is not for a just cause alone, though this cause is just. It is to protect our country, our people, our economy, our way of life" (HC Deb 8 October 2001, c.814). This aligned with Blair's fifth 'test' from his 1999 Chicago speech, "Do we have national interest involved?" (Blair, 1999), in which he argued that national interest provides a legitimate basis for action. As such, the Blair government emphasised that fighting alongside the Americans in the GWOT was in Britain's national interest. "America was attacked because of what it stood for, and we stood for those same values. Of course, we would stand shoulder to shoulder. This was a Western collective problem" (Blair & Brown New Labour Revolution, 2021). As Lord Jay opined:

> Blair believed that staying with the Americans was a fundamental part of our [British] foreign policy and that being on a different side from the Americans on an issue of foreign policy…would not be good for Britain's interests as a long-term special partner of the United States.[17]

[14] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2022.
[15] Interview with General Sir John McColl, iPhone, 4 April 2022.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2022.

These speeches made by Bush and Blair reflect ongoing debates in Whitehall and Washington about striking the balance between the role of hard power in Afghanistan and the extent to which it should be supplemented by soft power tools, such as humanitarian assistance. Blair believed it was important to influence the US agenda such that American engagement with Afghanistan would extend beyond pure kinetic force. Through its close relationship with Washington, London sought to harness American hard power in Afghanistan, which had initial and short-term effectiveness, and to combine that with elements of soft power. While it is difficult to say conclusively that Bush's use of secondary justifications, was a direct consequence of Blair's influence, what can be surmised is that both leaders recognised that intervention should include elements of both hard and soft power although the Bush administration heavily emphasised the use of hard power in Afghanistan. As this chapter will later explore, ultimately, the US did draw back its initial strategy to launch a light-touch invasion in Afghanistan albeit without a suitable post-war reconstruction plan. As a result of British pressure, however, Washington understood that in order to build a sustainable peace in Afghanistan post-Taliban, it would require engaging with other elements of power.

### 3.5 The role of context

This section examines another component of the analytical framework - the role of context and opportunity – to understand how the UK exercised smart power and sought to influence US intervention in Afghanistan. Blair viewed the 9/11 terrorist attacks as an important moment to rally alongside the US and to support American operations against the threat of global terrorism. This exercise of strategic empathy created a situational context whereby Blair accumulated unprecedented levels of political capital and gained unparalleled access to decision-making in Washington. London's initial outpouring of

support was not only a concrete expression of the special relationship, but British diplomacy "helped to translate the outpouring of sympathy for the US into a broad international coalition" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002b). In other words, Britain's solidarity for its Atlantic partner in the aftermath of 9/11 demonstrated not just the enduring nature of the special relationship, but an alliance also based on realist considerations. London hoped that "because the UK jumped on the bus first, it would be able to help steer it" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2001). This point was emphasised during interviews with British government officials including John Casson, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, Lord Jay of Ewelme, Sir David Manning and the late Sir Christopher Meyer, all of whom highlighted Blair's excellent diplomatic skills in rallying the international community on behalf of the US.

Central to this strategy was Blair's self-imposed role as "Europe's leader in the fight against terrorism" (Meyer, 2005, p.198) as European support was critical to the US gaining authorisation to use military force. Just hours after the attacks, Blair mobilised an international coalition by speaking to key world leaders including French President Jacques Chirac, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (Fiddes, 2020, p.102). In a 2021 BBC documentary on New Labour, Blair explained his position:

> It was important for our country that we stood with America. It was an important part of our future. You have a strong American relationship alongside a strong European relationship, and you keep those two strong and you will always have influence in the world. Through that influence, you protect your own interests and values (Blair & Brown New Labour Revolution, 2021).

Blair's support for the Americans in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, combined with his diplomatic skills in building an international consensus, that included powers who traditionally held more nuanced positions towards the US, notably in Central Asia (Fiddes, 2020, p.102), led one commentator in the *Wall Street Journal* to describe Blair as

America's "chief foreign ambassador to members of the emerging coalition" (Curtis, 2003, p.111).

Naturally, September 11 sent shockwaves around the world leading to an unprecedented amount of support given to the US in the immediate aftermath of the attacks; this was demonstrated by the UNSC' rapid response and NATO's decision to invoke Article 5 (Meyer, 2005, p.191). However, Blair's rapid mobilisation of the international community suggests that the UK played an active role in encouraging NATO to invoke Article 5 (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002b). As the US and its allies worked to navigate a new security environment characterised by the threat of international terrorism, Blair's vision for Britain as the transatlantic bridge became even more important.

Blair's vision of the UK being the bridge between the US and Europe was an extension of a long-standing tradition in British foreign policy by which the UK could maintain a strong role in the EU while preserving its privileged position within Washington as its leading ally (Archick, 2005, p.8). Historically, there has been a tendency to see Britain's special relationship with the US as conflicting with its close ties to Europe (Mangold, 2002, p.26). Blair held an alternative view however, much in the same vein as the Macmillan government in the 1960s, that Britain should "seek the best of both worlds" by acting as a bridge between the two (ibid.). According to Manning, with the exception of Macmillan, "Blair's identity as both an Atlanticist and pro-European distinguished him from previous British Prime Ministers who were one or the other but rarely, genuinely, both."[18] There are some, like Manning, who have discounted the portrayal of Blair as the transatlantic bridge, arguing instead that: "He [Blair] wasn't a bridge, but more of a focal

[18] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.

point after 9/11."[19] Whether Blair's role post-9/11 can be described as a 'transatlantic bridge' or a 'focal point' is not the primary focus of consideration. What is revealing, however, was Blair's unwavering belief that close US-UK relations gave the UK more influence in the EU, and that British influence would increase in Washington as long as it remained a key voice in Brussels (Archick, 2005, p.8).

Thus, under the Blair government, the UK successfully nurtured friendships within the transatlantic alliance with the goal of establishing itself as an influential power on the world stage (Hasan, 2014, p.2). Although the US and Europe were defined by diverging strategic cultures (Kaye, 2004), American and European policies converged on the matter of intervention in Afghanistan. On September 12, during a call with President Bush, where he pledged Britain's unwavering support, Blair confirmed the backing of key international partners (Blair, 2010, p.351). Moreover, Blair's perception of the UK as America's 'foreign policy mentor' created a context in which the Prime Minister believed he could influence Washington's decision-making in Afghanistan. Whether the Bush administration was steered in a particular direction is another question altogether, something this chapter will later explore.

London long viewed itself as Washington's mentor on matters of foreign policy, specifically humanitarian interventionism and counterinsurgency (Archick, 2005, p.7). As early as 1944, the Foreign Office described its US policy as steering "this great unwieldy barge, the United States, into the right harbour" (Harris, 2002, p.36). Former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who believed that America was the guarantor of Europe's defence, was known to exert great influence over President Reagan's policymaking, specifically with regards to America's anti-communist agenda. As Geoffrey Wheatcroft

[19] Ibid.

(2010, p.38) argued: “The only British future was to act as a junior partner in the hope of mentoring the Americans and perhaps sharing some of their glory”.

Tony Blair’s interactions with George Bush during the build-up to intervention of Afghanistan followed a similar trajectory. Like Thatcher, Blair viewed America as the new guardian of the post-9/11 world order, and Britain’s role was to align itself as the pivotal power (Porter, 2010). However, this dynamic of British mentor and American pupil had not always defined Blair’s relationship with sitting US Presidents. Before Bush was elected to office in 2000, Blair maintained a strong political relationship with President Bill Clinton, both of whom leaned towards the centre-left on the ideological spectrum. Clinton, who had presided over the 1998 Iraq bombing and NATO intervention of the Balkans, acted as foreign policy advisor to Blair during the early days of his premiership as British Prime Minister. Meyer elaborated more on this US-UK dynamic:

> Clinton was the kind of professor, a mentor, and Tony was the pupil…That kind of relationship with the President of the United States carried on into George W. Bush. Although Bush was a bit innocent when he came in as President, any hope that Tony Blair had of being his mentor rapidly disappeared.[20]

Thus, Blair assumed the role of foreign policy advisor to President Bush, who, at the time of 9/11, was a novice in foreign affairs. London’s view was that the Anglo-American partnership post-9/11 was to be “a marriage of American power and British wisdom” (Bobbitt, 2008, dedication page). However, unlike Thatcher’s approach to Reagan, who was reported to frequently “challenge and check Reagan”,[21] Blair was not known to pursue a hard-line approach with Bush. He was more reticent to challenge the President and risk endangering relations with Washington, particularly when it came to the issue of Iraq and removing Saddam Hussein from power. As Meyer recounted: “Thatcher enjoyed a relationship with Regan that was much more hard-nosed. She was never afraid

[20] Interview with Sir Christopher Meyer, Zoom, 23 February 2022.
[21] Ibid.

to say ‘Ron, you’re getting this wrong!’”.[22] This power dynamic within the Blair-Bush relationship will be further discussed in Chapter Four on Iraq.

While Blair may have perceived his role as Bush’s foreign policy adviser, the war in Afghanistan had demonstrated that British military strategy would become increasingly dictated by American military priorities (Dumbrell, 2004, p.449). This was echoed by Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles (2012, p.4), former British ambassador to Afghanistan from 2007 to 2009, in his memoir *Cables from Kabul*: “We had little alternative to joining the Americans in toppling the Taliban from power…when in the wake of 9/11 they had refused to hand over Osama bin Laden”.

As such, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the UK committed itself to standing alongside the US, thus legitimising British efforts to mobilise an international coalition to intervene in Afghanistan (Rees and Davies, 2019, p.313). In an evolving post-Cold War security environment and in the face of the threat of global terrorism, both sides embraced the narrative of fighting “side by side with comrades in arms” (Ministry of Defence, 2013). The UK, in particular, emphasised to the US the meta-narrative that they would not “let them down” during a crisis (Rees and Davies, 2019, p.327). As Hasan (2014, p.6) argued, the logic of “your problem becomes my problem” reinforced the special quality of the Anglo-American alliance. This language was employed by the UK, in particular, to attach itself to its transatlantic ally. John Casson, a British diplomat who served in Washington opined:

> Over Afghanistan and 9/11, it was just a visceral political instinct that Blair had…when the chips are down, we’re always together…that’s our closest ally and by far the most powerful country on earth. Of course, we’re going to be unequivocal.[23]

[22] Ibid.
[23] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.

The narrative that Britain would "stand side by side" with the Americans (Blair, 2010, p.354) translated into British efforts to prove to its US counterparts that the UK had both the military resources and political will to operate alongside their ally in a crisis. Britain's sense of obligation to America served a purpose: it enabled the UK to "show willing" to the US by using its military power as an instrument of policy to maintain the special relationship (Betz and Cormack, 2009, pp.333-334). In terms of political and military support, the UK government offered specific military and intelligence support (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2001). Furthermore, the US government requested particular UK military assets to be deployed in OEF, including: basing rights at Diego Garcia, reconnaissance and other aircraft as well as missile-firing submarines (Blair, 2001).

While Blair's show of empathy for the US was genuine, Britain's involvement in the GWOT was not solely values-driven. Blair was arguably opportunistic regarding the new world order now presented before him. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Blair (2010, p.367) wrote: "This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us reorder this world around us". For Blair, military intervention in Afghanistan was one instance through which the UK could seek to reorder the 'new world'. Thus, OEF was not a purely conventional military conflict. As Blair reflected in his memoir: "This was not a battle for territory, not a battle between states; it was a battle for and about the ideas and values that would shape the twenty-first century" (ibid., p.345). By remaining close to the Americans, Blair hoped that the UK would be granted a role in helping shape the new post-9/11 world order.

### 3.6 Utilising the 'special relationship'

This section examines the third element of the analytical framework of smart power – how the UK utilised its perception of the special relationship to advance its foreign policy interests in Afghanistan. London viewed the special relationship as fundamental to promoting international security in a post-9/11 world. As Manning stated, "This was a new world order…We [Britain] had to deal with the threat and we needed to deal with it in common."[24] One month after September 11, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) laid out its first key objective: "to work with the US and others to defeat terrorism worldwide" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2001), and increased its diplomatic and military support in the run-up to OEF. In exchange for British political support and military action in Afghanistan, the Blair government hoped to shape the US agenda in the region. Whether Blair was able to influence American foreign policy preferences in Afghanistan, however, is another question altogether and suggests that, as a conceptual framework, smart power has its limitations.

To promote international security in a post-9/11 world, ties with the Bush administration became increasingly special and useful to the UK. As such, the diplomatic side of the special relationship was greatly revitalised. As Blair wrote in his memoir, *A Journey*: "I believed in the alliance with America…and I knew that alliances are only truly fashioned at times of challenge, not in times of comfort" (2010, p.352). As such, he believed it was his "duty to stay on good terms with Washington" (Stephens, 2021), believing that "staying on the same side as the Americans" was fundamental to British foreign policy.[25] As such, US-UK diplomatic ties became uniquely close during the Bush-Blair years. As Meyer reflected: "The relationship was one of…extraordinary cooperation. Between the White House and Downing Street, between the embassy and the upper

[24] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.
[25] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2022.

reaches of the rest of the administration, we had instant access, which no other embassy could get…"[26]

This position, that the alliance acted as a cornerstone for British defence and security policy (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2001), was, as first noted, outlined by the Foreign Office in 1944 as a key British objective (Baylis and Marsh, 2006, p.202) and remained a dominant viewpoint upheld by many Anglo-American scholars (Warner, 1989; Azubuike, 2006; Strachan, 2009; Wheatcroft, 2010). As Meyer reflected: "Blair…believed that the relationship with the United States was a good thing in and of itself, that the special relationship was all you needed, like a lovely vase on the mantelpiece."[27] In fact, Blair valued London's relationship with Washington to the extent that he often had "anxiety that he was going to wreck the special relationship by asking questions that were too pointed."[28]

While there was no denying the special qualities of the relationship, during his time in Washington, Meyer famously banned the phrase within the British embassy altogether, describing the relationship as: "a concept, which has become increasingly devoid of meaning and out of date, and actually, in many instances, works against the British national interest."[29] This realist perception of the alliance was equally shared by other members of the British military, including General Sir John McColl: "There's no such thing as a 'special relationship' or friendships in international relations…it is all to do with self-interest."[30] Moreover, Sir Peter Westmacott, former British ambassador to the US from 2012 to 2016, argued that realpolitik, not romantic sentiment, guided US-UK

[26] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.
[27] Interview with Sir Christopher Meyer, Zoom, 23 February 2022.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Interview with General Sir John McColl, iPhone, 4 April 2022.

interactions: “The reality is…America has looked after its own interests when it’s dealing with the United Kingdom, as it does when dealing with any other foreign country.”[31]

This realist perception about the specialness of the Anglo-American relationship, as described by Meyer, McColl and Westmacott, is one interpretation held by some British policy elites. However, the researcher argues that the assessment of the special relationship is much more nuanced. As previously discussed, Blair believed he could capitalise on Britain’s privileged access to Washington and shape American policy in Afghanistan, in particular, to integrate hard power tools with other elements of power in OEF, namely diplomacy and humanitarian assistance, instead of an over-reliance on military power alone. As Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, later told a journalist from *the Observer* during an interview in November 2003: “There isn’t anything that can be done about the fact”, arguing that the best option for the UK was to “relate to America in the most constructive way possible…to ensure that this power is used for the better” (Dumbrell, 2006, p.151). British policy objectives in Afghanistan included: convincing the US to pursue a multilateral approach in OEF, which involved the UN playing a key leadership role post-Taliban; and, as noted, urging Washington to include a humanitarian element in the campaign rather than a pure reliance on hard power alone. These will now be discussed in the following sections.

Firstly, London used its close relationship with Washington to mobilise an international coalition based on collective self-defence (Fiddes, 2020, p.103) and the prevention of further terrorist attacks against the West. On September 12, Blair sent Bush a five-page memo in which he reiterated British support, urged Bush to demand the Taliban relinquish the al-Qaeda terrorists responsible for the attacks and emphasised the

[31] Interview with Sir Peter Westmacott, Zoom, 3 May 2022.

importance of adopting a multilateral approach in Afghanistan (Lindsay, 2003, pp.102-107).

Subsequently, the Blair government was able to partly bind American power to international organisations, such as the UN, as part of the West's multilateral campaign against terrorism. As Sir Richard Dalton, who previously served as UK Ambassador to Libya and Iran, opined: "America will do what it wants to do…Soon as the United States invoked it [Article 5], we had no choice, nor did the rest of the world. Everybody agreed we had to go and remove this awful regime."[32] The UK's push for a prominent UN role in the GWOT demonstrated to the US that alliances and multilateralism were important for their political value, and not just their hard power contributions. Thus, the UK worked within the UNSC to gain agreement for Resolutions 1368 and 1373 which authorised taking "all necessary measures steps to respond…and to combat all forms of terrorism…" (UN Security Council, 2001) and hindering terrorist groups through financial constraints, immigration regulations and by establishing the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) to monitor state compliance with UN provisions (UN Security Council, 2001b), respectively. Although UNSCR 1368 did not provide legal authorisation to use military action, it did provide legitimate endorsement to intervene on the grounds of self-defence. Britain's emphasis on uniting a broad-based coalition to combat terrorism gave the US a powerful incentive to use the UN as a forum within which it could achieve its goal of obtaining global support for Anglo-American intervention (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2001).

Although pressured by hawkish neo-conservative voices, for example, Rumsfeld urged against "a single coalition as there was in the Gulf War" (US Department of

[32] Interview with Sir Richard Dalton, Zoom, 17 May 2022.

Defence, 2001b), Blair persuaded Bush to move away from a 'go it alone' mentality and to accept support from international partners. As a report by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee described, the US was initially reluctant to accept military contributions, but "Britain was active in encouraging a positive US response to the offer by allies…of military support" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002b).

### 3.7 The politics of personal relations

A final indicator of the exercise of smart power is the role of personal relations between individual leaders and decision-makers. One notable aspect on Anglo-American intervention in Afghanistan was the close relationship between President George Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair. More precisely, London's ability to partially shape the agenda in Washington was largely a result of Blair's personality and style of leadership. Blair's personal convictions, fuelled both by his religious faith and the previous success of British interventionism, combined with his "excessive self-confidence" (Owen, 2008), made him the ideal match for a newly elected American President faced with a national crisis with global implications.

At the October 2001 Labour Party Conference, Tony Blair promised the US: "We were with you at the first, and we'll be with you at the last" (Meyer, 2005, p.197). Following the attack on the twin towers in New York City, the immediate outpouring of support across the UK, such as the playing of the *Star-Spangled Banner* by the Coldstream Guards outside Buckingham Palace (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2001), deeply resonated with American audiences. "Tony Blair had become an American hero", wrote the late Sir Christopher Meyer in his memoir, *DC Confidential* (2005, p.205). Blair's appearance at the US Joint Sessions of Congress only nine days after 9/11 demonstrated the alliance's unity of purpose. Bush's proclamation, "America has no truer

friend than Great Britain", was a public display of America's special regard for its relationship with Britain.

Moreover, London received multiple reports from Washington that "the United Kingdom's prompt actions immediately after the events of September 11 were regarded by Americans not only as significant, symbolic acts of solidarity, but also as very concrete expressions of the special relationship" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2001). As Blair told Congress, "Your loss is our loss. Your struggle is our struggle" (Blair, 2010, p.354); Blair's speech illustrated he understood the traumatising impact of 9/11 on the American people,[33] a country that was unfamiliar with the realities of fighting a war on home soil. This outpouring of British sympathy reflected the British Prime Minister's close personal bond with the American President as both governments worked in lockstep to combat the threat of international terrorism.

Although Tony Blair and George Bush were far from being political soulmates, (Blair's liberal 'New Labour' policies were ideologically opposed to Bush's neo-conservative agenda which promoted limited government); both leaders shared the belief in the West's obligation to fight global terror. Meyer described Blair and Bush as "two soul brothers with messianic views",[34] and despite their differing approaches to domestic politics, Blair was "the neo-con's neo-con."[35]

Blair believed that the emerging security threat – acts of terrorism indiscriminately waged by non-state actors – required a coordinated and global response. As such, "Blair took it upon himself to take on the role of sole cheerleader for the US around the world" argued Cowper-Coles (Mumford, 2017, p.182). Blair's decision to "stand shoulder to

[33] Interview with Sir Christopher Meyer, Zoom, 23 February 2022.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

shoulder" alongside the US in the wake of 9/11 (Blair, 2010, p.352) was not just a demonstration of British solidarity with America, but it was also an expression of British smart power. Blair's role conception of the UK as America's 'faithful ally' guided his belief that Britain's role in GWOT was to assemble the international community in support of the US to address the emerging threat of terrorism in a new post-9/11 security environment. In an interview with Sir David Manning, he reflected on Blair's role in mobilising an international coalition after 9/11:

> He found himself, because he's a natural activist, taking on the role of rallying the international community behind the idea that we were all in this together. This wasn't just America's fight. Suddenly, terrorism was a global phenomenon, and the international order was seriously at stake.[36]

In sum, Blair's outpouring of sympathy and emotional support following the 9/11 terrorist attacks were not only well-timed, but the UK government's actions further cemented the US-UK special relationship (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002b). Put simply, crises tend to unite people and states together. As Casson stated: "After 9/11 was a very intense period. Any big policy question in security and foreign policy was being debated inside the US administration, we [UK] would expect to know at least as much about it as the US State Department."[37] The post-9/11 period created a visceral environment in which the US and UK enjoyed an unusually close relationship, characterised by frequent communications and exchanges of information.[38] It was the right setting for London to not just empathise and console, but also to persuade its ally to adopt certain policies; for example, pursuing multilateralism and securing UN support to intervene militarily following a 48-hour ultimatum to the Taliban government.

[36] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.
[37] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.
[38] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022; Interview with Sir Christopher Meyer, Zoom, 23 February 2022.

Thus, as the US began to write its next chapter in Afghanistan, the UK assumed the role of co-author. Critics have accused Blair of falling victim to the allure of American power. As Cowper-Coles stated: "Blair was a 'yes man' when it came to the US."[39] Whether Blair struggled to push back on American power has become a topic of much debate. What the evidence does suggest is that Blair believed close prime ministerial-presidential relations were integral to Britain's ability to influence US policy in Afghanistan. Blair's perception of Britain's NRC as America's 'faithful ally' guided the UK government's decision to remain in lockstep with the Americans in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, in the hope that it could influence the scope and direction of intervention. As such, Blair accumulated high levels of political capital in Washington and London was partially successful in influencing some aspects of US intervention pursuing a multilateral approach through the UN. Ultimately, who leads matters in the foreign policy of nations (Kaarbo, 2017, p.20). As Henry Kissinger once stated: "I tended to think of history as run by imperial forces but when you see it in practice, you see the differences personalities makes" (Isaacson, 1992, p.13).

### 3.8 Conclusion: Evidence of British influence?

This chapter has sought to answer the core research question against the first case of Anglo-American intervention in CA + MENA. During the 2001 war in Afghanistan, the UK sought to influence the scope and direction of intervention; however, while "the UK's feather weighed in the scale",[40] London did not determine US decision-making. As discussed previously in this chapter, on the one hand, London did influence debates in Washington over the importance of ensuring that there was a humanitarian element to

[39] Interview with Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, London, 13 April 2022.
[40] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.

intervention. However, the US' lack of planning about post-conflict nation-building showed the limitations of Britain's smart power to fully influence US policy preferences.

When OEF was launched in October 2001, the Bush administration was reticent about planning to commit American resources to Afghanistan once the Taliban was removed from power. US indifference towards post-conflict reconstruction was best captured by Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, who famously argued: "We don't do nation-building."[41] In a US government document dated October 16, 2001, weeks after the 9/11 attacks, Rumsfeld outlined the first phase of US strategy in Afghanistan, emphasising to his policy aide, Douglas Feith, that "the US should not commit to any post-Taliban military involvement since the US will be heavily engaged in the anti-terrorism effort worldwide" (Rumsfeld, 2001). Moreover, in this same document, which included Rumsfeld's handwritten edits, he added the word "military", referring to the "US military", within the context of whether the UN or a coalition of volunteer states would lead a peacekeeping force in Afghanistan (ibid.). US policy objectives in Afghanistan involved the eradication of al-Qaeda terrorists and removing the Taliban regime, but Rumsfeld was careful not to commit US forces to post-war stabilisation efforts. America would engage diplomatically but Rumsfeld argued that it was not "in US power to assure a specific outcome" (ibid.).

London diverged with Washington over the subject of nation-building in the lead-up to OEF. The UK declared it would remain committed to helping the Afghan people establish a "broad-based government" that would reflect "different ethnic groupings" (HC Deb 8 October 2001, c.812), although it is arguable whether this could be described as 'nation-building'. In his speech to Parliament, just one day after the launch of OEF, Blair

[41] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022; Interview with General Sir John McColl, iPhone, 4 April 2022.

restated Britain's commitment to the Afghan people: "We will not walk away from them once the conflict ends…we will stand by them and help them to a better, more stable future…" (ibid.). By contrast, US policy was dominated by Rumsfeld's thinking of "go in light and get out quick."[42] As Manning stated: "That had been the philosophy in Afghanistan…you go in, decapitate the Taliban, you put somebody like Karzai in charge and you believe 'job done'…all the American military needs to do is find UBL, we're not interested in nation-building."[43]

As a military campaign, OEF was an overwhelming success in the first few months of the conflict. The campaign consisted of US airstrikes on Taliban and al-Qaeda forces combined with special forces working alongside the Northern Alliance and other anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan. The UK government delegated a sizeable contingent of UK personnel to the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) to support US forces in Afghanistan (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002b). By November 12, the Northern Alliance regained Kabul from the Taliban and controlled 70% of the country (Katzman, 2004, p.9). From an American perspective, the main objective had been achieved: the Taliban was removed from power and al-Qaeda's support base destroyed. However, the UK argued that OEF required a "broad response that was political, economic, ideological and educational, and the military instrument can be only one part of the response" (HL Deb 5 November 2001, c.20). The UK looked beyond military hard power to combat the threat of terrorism and sought to tackle "the conditions which enable terrorists to recruit and win support" by focusing on 'softer' elements, such as poverty reduction and promoting greater regional cooperation in Central Asia and the Middle East (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002b).

[42] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.
[43] Ibid.

Moreover, when it came to planning the post-war political process, there was also a divergence of approach within the alliance about delivering elections for the Afghan people. The UK had promised to support the Afghan people in establishing a transitional administration leading to a new formation of government. On October 22, 2001, in a speech at the International Institute of Strategic Studies, UK Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, outlined four main objectives for British policy in Afghanistan post-Taliban: the future of Afghanistan had to be in the hands of Afghan people; a global coalition was needed to rebuild Afghanistan; the UN should lead the political process; and the UK needed to commit the resources and political will to "finish the job" (Straw, 2001).

Similarly, the US strategy in Afghanistan initially involved an integrated approach, including military, diplomatic and humanitarian elements. However, as noted the Bush administration did not envisage for American resources to commit to long-term post-war stabilisation efforts; the core objectives were to destroy al-Qaeda training camps, overthrow the Taliban and to find Osama bin Laden. This would create problems further down the campaign timeline. The expectation within Washington was that the US would lead on intervention (Bailey, 2013, p.13), and the UK, along with European partners, would lead on nation-building. The "American warrior ethos", which was pervasive within US military circles, led to the US reneging on its peace enforcement duties (Strachan, 2013, p.334). Meanwhile, the British were perceived as the 'experts' when it came to conducting counterinsurgency and nation-building activities due to its track record in Northern Ireland, Kosovo and Sierra Leone. General Sir John McColl argued that the "arrogant supposition of British superiority" did not serve British efforts as the experiences

from counterinsurgencies in small countries like Northern Ireland, could not be arbitrarily applied to a Muslim, Central Asian context, and therefore deemed of limited relevance.[44]

Some within London, such as Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, warned that the divergent approaches to nation-building within the Anglo-American alliance would impede democratic progress. He contended that the democratic elections arranged under the 2001 Bonn Agreement, would be "out of keeping with Afghan traditions"[45] and did not account for cultural sensitivities. Elections, for example, "should come at the end of a process of building consensus from the ground-up", [46] not the other way around as the Americans had planned. During the interview, Cowper-Coles recalled a conversation he had with US officials who he believed were "naïve" [47] about the deeper political, ethnic and religious forces at play. He commented: "We weren't allowed by the Americans to talk to the Taliban. We weren't allowed to run a political process. America has this black and white view of the world, good and evil, very binary…".[48]

Despite Britain's inability to shape American planning around the nation-building process, the Blair government was successful in influencing the Bush administration to see the usefulness of the UN in leading the post-conflict reconstruction phase as part of a wider global campaign against terrorism. Again, Blair's emphasis on the role of the UN in Afghanistan was a result of his own perception of Britain's role as the 'influential rule of law state' who had a duty to uphold international law and to abide by global institutions. The 2001 intervention of Afghanistan had "paved the way" for UN efforts to form a broad-based Afghan government in accordance with UNSC 1378 which called for a "central UN role in establishing a transitional administration and inviting member states to send

[44] Interview with General Sir John McColl, iPhone, 4 April 2022.
[45] Interview with Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, London, 13 April 2022.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

peacekeeping forces to promote stability and secure the delivery of humanitarian assistance" (Katzman, 2004, pp.11-12). The CTC initiative had depended greatly on British diplomatic and political leadership; and subsequentially, Washington had adopted the view that fighting terrorism had to be achieved through multilateral means. For instance, on November 10, 2001, President Bush delivered a speech before the UN's 56th General Assembly where he expressed the US administration's value of the UN in fighting terrorism. "The United Nations was created for this cause" and terrorism must be "opposed early, decisively and collectively…" (Bush, 2001g). In that same speech, Bush committed the US to working "with the UN to support to post-Taliban government that represents all of the Afghan people" (ibid.). This was a clear departure from Rumsfeld's perspective of the UN's role in Afghanistan, as captured in his memo to Douglas Feith, the undersecretary of Defence for Policy from 2001 to 2005, in which he advised against "engaging UN diplomacy" which was perceived as potentially "…interfering with U.S. military operations and inhibit coalition freedom of action" (Rumsfeld, 2001).

Had Blair's voice rung louder in Bush's ear than the President's own Secretary of Defence? According to Meyer, both Blair and Bush agreed on the importance of securing UN and NATO support in Afghanistan despite voices within the American military elite, such as Rumsfeld, who insisted that the "mission defined the coalition" and not the reverse (Meyer, 2005 pp.191-192). However, as former US Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates stated, when it came to the issue of nation-building, "Rumsfeld was pretty much alone on this".[49] Unlike Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, advocated for the US to work "with the international community and the Afghan people", and specifically with the UN "to help the Afghans form a new government" (Powell, 2001). Powell's view seemed to align with that of the UK Government's position on Afghanistan post-Taliban, as communicated by

[49] Interview with Secretary Robert Gates, Zoom, 7 July 2022.

UK Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, who called for the UN to play "a leading role in any transition" (HL Deb 5 Nov 2001, c.94). Again, as noted, this supports accounts of there being a "Powell-Blair" axis which countered the "Cheney-Rumsfeld" influence in Washington (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002c).

As figures inside the Bush White House, such as Colin Powell, shared Blair's preference for the UN to play a leading role in post-war reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, it is difficult to claim that Blair's influence alone was responsible for the administration's pursuit of a multilateral reconstruction plan. However, the research does suggest that London did have leverage in influencing Washington to see the political value of pursuing a multilateral approach through international organisations, like the UN, in Afghanistan.

To summarise, London could not completely determine US decision-making. On the one hand, Blair was able to influence debates in Washington over the importance of including a humanitarian element to intervention in Afghanistan and convinced the Bush administration to see the usefulness of the UN leading the post-conflict reconstruction phase. However, the UK was unable to fully shape US policy preferences around the issue of nation-building as the Bush administration was wary of committing American troops and resources towards post-war stabilisation efforts. In sum, the lack of suitable planning for post-conflict nation-building showed the limitations of Britain's smart power to fully influence the US agenda.

The UK would ultimately shoulder a heavy burden for its decision to join its Atlantic ally in Afghanistan. Some have argued that the UK paid a high 'blood price' to sustain its special relationship with the US (Porter, 2010, p.356). According to a 2021 Parliamentary research briefing, the campaign would end up costing the UK £22.7 billion

in total as well as the lives of 457 British personnel not including over 2,000 troops who sustained injuries (Dempsey, 2021, pp.2-6). The pursuit of ‘specialness’ had not just cost the UK, paid in blood and treasure, but it ultimately proved ruinous for UK diplomacy. British soft power, in particular, eroded as a result of the UK complying with practices of torture and rendition (Porter, 2010, p.356). It raises the question: at what point was the cost of Atlantic specialness too high? America’s invasion of Iraq in March 2003 would force the UK to answer this looming question.

# Chapter 4. Iraq

*"The planning on this and the strategy are the toughest yet. This is not Kosovo. This is not Afghanistan. It is not even the Gulf War."* (Tony Blair to George W. Bush, July 2002)[50]

## 4.1 Introduction

"War is the continuation of politics by other means", said Carl von Clausewitz (Esposito, 1954). In the case of the 2003 Iraq War, Anglo-American intervention sought to accomplish two primary political goals: to overthrow Saddam Hussein and to disarm Iraq of its WMD, although the latter proved irrelevant as evidence of Iraq's development of a nuclear weapons programme was never uncovered. While the former political objective was achieved, intervention of Iraq on March 20, 2003, led to the unintended consequence of a prolonged counterinsurgency "to rid the aftermath of the reign of terror" (Blair, 2010, pp.391-92), and fuelled wider radicalisation across the Middle East.

The degree to which the Blair government influenced the Bush administration in Iraq has been a topic of considerable debate. Through the lens of smart power, this chapter will explore the UK's alliance with the US in the run-up to the Iraq War in March 2003 to understand how the UK influenced the scope and direction of US policy. This chapter examines the decision-making process at the elite level within the US-UK alliance, specifically the personal relations between Tony Blair and George W. Bush. Many of the decisions made in the run-up to intervention occurred within a closed decision-making process between these leaders. Blair, for example, reportedly did not discuss the legality of the invasion or the execution of the military campaign with Cabinet members and senior officials (Chilcot, 2016a, p.110). Like Afghanistan, Iraq has been selected as a case study to test the Anglo-American alliance in an instance of military intervention in CA + MENA

[50] Memo to George W. Bush from Tony Blair, 28 July 2002, 'Note on Iraq', TNA.

to promote international security post-9/11. This chapter has been structured similarly to the previous one and test the analytical framework of smart power against a case of Anglo-American intervention to understand how the UK exercised smart power. To understand the dynamics of the special relationship in Iraq, it is imperative to examine the events leading up to the launch of the US-led campaign, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) on March 20, 2003.

### 4.2 Iraq policy pre-9/11

Just three days before Coalition forces invaded Afghanistan, Robin Cook, Tony Blair's Foreign Secretary who later resigned on 17 March 2003, wrote: "The only thing that could go wrong for us would be in the shape of friendly fire if President Bush succumbs to pressure from the far right to do it all over again in Iraq" (Ashton, 2022, p.393). Blair was aware of the foreign policy hawks within Bush's inner circle who wanted to topple Saddam. As discussed, in the days following the 9/11 attacks, Blair has been credited for steering Bush away from Iraq to focus solely on Afghanistan. In a note dated October 11, 2001, Blair wrote to Bush: "I have no doubt we have to deal with Saddam…But if we hit Iraq now, we would lose the Arab world, Russia, probably half the EU…".[51] However, that did not settle the issue of Iraq. In that same note, Blair assured Bush they would revisit Iraq, 'Phase Two', of the GWOT campaign: "I am sure we can devise a strategy for Saddam deliverable at a later date".[52] Unknown to many within the UK Parliament, including Cook, the question of Iraq was "already under active consideration in No 10" (Ashton, 2022, pp.293). On December 4, 2001, Blair wrote another memo to Bush titled "The War against Terrorism: The Second Phase", in which he

[51] Memo to George W. Bush from Tony Blair, 11 October 2001, 'untitled', TNA.
[52] Ibid.

advocated for a policy of regime change. "Iraq is a threat because it has WMD capability…we need a strategy for regime change that builds over time".[53]

Before September 11, the UK policy towards Iraq had been one of containment. The policy was reviewed by the Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy (DOP) in May 1999 which formally outlined the UK's main objectives in Iraq "to reduce the threat Saddam poses to the region including by eliminating his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programmes; and in the longer term, to reintegrate a territorially intact Iraq as a law-abiding member of the international community" (Chilcot, 2016a, pp.6-7). The UK's containment policy was seen as the "only viable way" to pursue these objectives as it was thought that the international community would never sanction a policy of regime change to remove Saddam (ibid., p.7). As such, the UNSC adopted resolution 1284 in December 1999 which established a new weapons inspectorate, United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC), and an agreement that economic sanctions would be lifted should inspectors report cooperation in key areas (UN Security Council, 1999). Saddam, however, refused to re-admit weapons inspectors, thus rejecting resolution 1284 (Chilcot, 2016a, p.7).

Meanwhile, George W. Bush's election victory in November 2000 led to the UK reviewing its containment policy as concerns were raised about the policy's sustainability long term (ibid.). According to John Sawers, Blair's Foreign Affairs Adviser, the Prime Minister's "preferred option" was to implement 1284, "enabling the inspectors to return and sanctions to be suspended".[54] In a letter to John Sawers from Tim Barrow, Private Secretary to Robin Cook, the British embassy in Washington reported "growing pressure

[53] Memo to George W. Bush from Tony Blair, 4 December 2001, 'The War against Terrorism: The Second Phase', TNA.
[54] Letter to Sherard Cowper-Coles from John Sawers, 27 November 2000, 'Iraq', DNSA.

to change course from containment to military action to oust Saddam Hussein" although President Clinton had not pursued policy change.[55]

While containment had been the stated position of the UK Government, on the basis that the policy was "broadly successful" (Chilcot, 2016a, p.8); a policy of regime change had been on the White House agenda long before 9/11. "Even in the late 1990s…Congress by an overwhelming bipartisan majority passed the resolution saying it was a policy objective of the United States to overthrow Saddam Hussein"[56], stated John Bolton, who served as US Ambassador to the UN from 2005 to 2006. "There was no evidence that Saddam was serious about giving up the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, and as long as he's still pursuing them, that's a threat in the region and worldwide".[57]

Similarly, a discussion paper produced by Alan Goulty, Director of Middle East and North Africa department at the FCO, outlined to the UK Cabinet Office the implications of a new 'hawkish' administration in Washington on policy in Iraq.[58] In addition to highlighting the Bush team now included "noted hawks" who wanted "to see sanctions on Iraq tightened, not loosened", it also mentioned Bush's previous public attack on the Clinton administration for failing to "get rid of Saddam for eight years".[59] This Iraq policy was also shared by John Bolton, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and other notable foreign policy hawks from the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) who wrote an open letter to President Bill Clinton in January 1998 calling the for the removal of Saddam Hussein.[60] Goulty warned the UK Government against waiting "until

[55] Letter to John Sawers from Tim Barrow, 15 December 2000, 'Iraq', TNA.
[56] Interview with Ambassador John Bolton, Zoom, 24 June 2022.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Letter to Tom McKane from Alan Goulty, 20 October 2000, 'Iraq Future Strategy', TNA.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Letter to President Bill Clinton from the PNAC, 26 January 1998, 'untitled'.

the new US administration beds down to tackle them on Iraq policy", arguing "we need to get in early before they make too many public policy statements from which it would be difficult to draw back…".[61] This suggests that the UK government's objective to influence US policy in Iraq pre-dated 9/11. However, it was ultimately the terrorist attacks on America's homeland, not British pressure, that would change Washington's mind about Iraq. As General Sir Simon Mayall, who served as Deputy Commanding General of the Multi-National Corps in Iraq from 2006 to 2007, wrote:

> Even as the Taliban regime was being toppled, some Bush advisers were arguing for an immediate invasion of Iraq, putting forward a cocktail of good reasons to use the catalyst of 9/11 to remove the Saddam Hussein thorn from their collective sides (2020, p.204).

September 11 changed the risk calculus for Washington and London. As Lord Peter Ricketts, former head of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), stated: "9/11 was the sea change both for Bush and Blair. After 9/11…Saddam had to be brought to comply with his UN obligations or action had to be taken against him…".[62] According to interviews with Lord Ricketts, Sir David Manning and other London officials, Blair's concern about the possibility of 'rogue states' like Iraq obtaining chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and providing them to extremist terrorist groups was more than just a catastrophic risk, it was a deep personal conviction. As Lord Ricketts stated, "The power of conviction was not something to be underestimated with Blair…He genuinely, burningly believed it…it turned out to be wrong in the case of Iraq, but that didn't lesson how strongly he believed it".[63] The extent to which Blair's personal convictions, about the threat that Saddam posed to international security, played a role in shaping US policy in Iraq will be explored later in this chapter.

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[61] Letter to Tom McKane from Alan Goulty, 20 October 2000, 'Iraq Future Strategy', TNA.
[62] Interview with Lord Peter Ricketts, Zoom, 23 June 2022.
[63] Ibid.

## 4.3 Road to war

On November 8, 2002, the UNSC, led in no small part by Tony Blair, unanimously passed resolution 1441, which condemned Saddam's lack of compliance with resolution 687 (the 1991 Gulf War ceasefire resolution), regarding inspection and disarmament in Iraq. As such, UN weapons inspectors from UNMOVIC were readmitted to Iraq in late November 2002 (Taylor and Youngs, 2003, p.3). The return of UN weapons inspectors gave Iraq the final opportunity to comply with its obligations to disarm itself of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Briefings issued for the UNSC by Hans Blix, the director of UNMOVIC, and Mohammad al-Baradei, the director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), criticised Iraq for failing to resolve outstanding questions about its WMD program, although two briefings on February 24 and March 7, 2003, mentioned progress had been made (Katzman, 2004, p.22). Ultimately, UNMOVIC inspectors reported that it was not possible to declare that Iraq was fully complying with its obligations (Taylor and Youngs, 2003, p.3). Meanwhile, the build-up of US, UK and Coalition forces, which first began in November 2002, intensified across the Gulf by early March 2003 (ibid.).

At this point, the international debate surrounding policy towards Iraq had reached a critical stage. Those within the Security Council who opposed military force, including France, Germany, Russia and China argued that the Blix/Baradei briefings suggested that Iraq could be disarmed peacefully and that inspections should be allowed more time. However, the US, UK, Spain and Bulgaria maintained that Iraq had flouted calls for disarmament. Both the US and the UK argued that diplomatic options to disarm Saddam peacefully, including efforts to secure a second UNSC resolution authorising the use of force, had failed. On March 17, 2003, President Bush gave Saddam and his sons a 48-hour deadline to leave Iraq or risk facing military force (Chilcot, 2016a, p.6).

The US, UK and other allies launched Operation Iraqi Freedom at 0234 GMT on March 20, 2003, although some air strikes had previously been undertaken on March 19 under the guise of enforcing the southern no-fly-zone (Taylor and Youngs, 2003, p.3). The campaign began with a limited airstrike on senior Iraqi leadership followed by a simultaneous launch of air and ground operations (ibid.). US Marines and British troops were deployed in the south to capture southern Iraq's oil fields and to secure the Al-Faw Peninsula, the Umm Qasr port and Basra region (US Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2003) while the US Army 5th Corps advanced towards Baghdad (Taylor and Youngs, 2003, p.3). After weeks of heavy fighting, British forces captured Basra city on April 6 and US forces took control of Baghdad on April 8 and 9 (ibid.). On April 9, the statue of Saddam in Firdos (Paradise) Square was symbolically toppled; images of Iraqis beating the statue with their shoes were aired across the world's media outlets (Mayall, 2020, p.210). After the capture of Tikrit by Coalition forces on April 13, US-led combat operations concluded on April 15 (US Department of Defence, 2003).

On May 1, 2003, President Bush stood aboard the aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln* and declared an end to major combat operations in Iraq, thus marking the beginning of the "security and stability phase" in Iraq (ibid.). A banner, imprinted with the words "mission accomplished", hung as a backdrop to the President's speech, made the bold assertion that the US and its allies had won the war in Iraq. Unfortunately, the overwhelming success by US and Coalition forces was short-lived. While victory was secured in less than two months, the campaign's initial success was "eclipsed by poor post-war planning and underwhelming operational performance as the demands ramped up" (Mumford, 2017, p.162). The Coalition had failed to heed Clausewitz's warning that war is politics by other means - the realities of the war in Iraq would not align with their strategic goals (Mayall, 2020, p.211). The coming months and years, which were characterised by

bloody sectarian violence that marked the Iraqi insurgency, would prove that the mission in Iraq was far from over.

### 4.4 The UK's role in Iraq

As in Afghanistan, the British played a supporting role to the Americans in Iraq. The UK government committed to stand "shoulder to shoulder" (Blair, 2010, p.352) with the US in Iraq, both out of principle and to secure Britain's national interests. As Sir Richard Dalton put it: "We [UK] went in primarily because the United States wanted to go in, and that drew us in alongside."[64] Unlike Afghanistan, however, where British support was instinctive following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the connection between September 11 and Iraq was not self-evident (Brown, 2017, p.248). Britain's instinct would become tested in the years that followed where British and American interests and approaches to intervention in Iraq began to diverge.

The UK supported US intervention in Iraq in two primary ways: rallying the international community against the threat posed by Saddam and providing military assistance and resources to the campaign. The UK's role in Iraq was demonstrated by its exercise of diplomatic leadership and deployment of military power to ostensibly tackle the threat of Iraqi WMD and to maintain the Western-led world order. Despite London's efforts to exercise multilateral diplomacy through global institutions, such as the UN, to legitimise the invasion, the US-led campaign in Iraq demonstrated an overwhelming reliance on hard power.

Firstly, in a show of diplomatic leadership, the UK helped create a "coalition of the willing" which exemplified a commitment to overthrow Saddam and the Ba'athist regime.

[64] Interview with Sir Richard Dalton, Zoom, 17 May 2002.

Blair saw the UK's role as "galvanising world opinion in favour of supporting the Americans after 9/11".[65] Blair's mission was "to go and evangelise support for America all over the world".[66] Just as he had previously rallied world leaders behind America's battle cry against the Taliban in Afghanistan, Blair sought to persuade the international community that they could no longer risk Saddam's "cat and mouse-like game with UN weapons inspectors" and the possibility of WMD falling into the hands terrorist groups (Scott, 2016, pp.293-294). The failure of the post-Gulf War sanctions regime, the repeated flouting of UN resolutions by Saddam combined with the emergence of the threat of international terrorism, solidified Blair's viewpoint that multilateral action ultimately had to be taken against Saddam. Furthermore, Blair believed that the UN's credibility would be called into question if the international community did not respond to further evidence of non-compliance with UN resolutions. In sum, Blair feared that "to retreat…would put at hazard all that we hold dearest" (Blair, 2003); thus, he believed it was in Britain's national interest to follow the US to war.

Moreover, Blair's decision to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with its principal ally in Iraq was an "essential demonstration of solidarity" (Chilcot, 2016a, p.5); another manifestation of Blair's NRC of Britain as America's 'faithful ally'. In conversations with former British diplomats and government officials, many of whom served with Tony Blair during his premiership, Blair's decision to follow the US into Iraq was described as "a gut feeling",[67] "a duty to follow",[68] "an instinct of always adventuring together",[69] and an assurance that Britain "would be with America through thick and thin".[70] As Sir David

[65] Interview with Lord Peter Ricketts, Zoom, 23 June 2022.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Interview with Sir Richard Dalton, Zoom, 17 May 2022.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.
[70] Interview with retired senior British Army officer, Spring 2022, name and location anonymised to protect the individual's identity.

Manning stated: “I think he [Blair] felt that he had a good relationship with Bush…the point about having allies is that you stick by people in tough times”.[71] In contrast, others have argued that Blair’s support was more pragmatic than sentimental. As Lord Jay stated: “Blair believed that staying with the Americans was a fundamental part of British foreign policy, and it was better for British interests as a long-term special partner of the US to stay on the same side as the Americans on foreign policy.”[72] This suggests that Blair regarded intervention in Iraq as fundamental to preserving his relationship with President Bush and ensuring the survival of the Anglo-American alliance. In sum, Blair’s decision to join the US in Iraq was largely driven by the belief that Britain’s interests were “best served when the UK remains close to the US” (Azubuike, 2006, p.91), a strategy that, as previously noted, had remained the cornerstone of British defence and security policy since the Second World War (Chilcot, 2016a, p.52).

While Blair’s pledge of British support has been criticised by some scholars as evidence of the Prime Minister’s ‘poodle-like’ subservience to the American President (Wither, 2003; Dunn, 2008; Hasan, 2014; Fiddes, 2020), some, such as John Bolton, argued that Blair’s show of support had little to do with servility. As Bolton stated: “I never saw him act like a poodle…it had nothing to do with subordinating Britain or anybody else. When there’s a conflict like this, somebody’s the leader, somebody’s not the leader, the US is the leader of the NATO alliance. That’s been true for the last 70 years.”[73] In other words, the US was “expected to champion and lead interventionism” and the UK would be “at America’s side in doing it” (Bailey, 2013, p.13).

[71] Interview with Sir David Manning, iPhone, 8 July 2022.
[72] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2022.
[73] Interview with Ambassador John Bolton, Zoom, 24 June 2022.

The argument, however, that Blair's unconditional support to Washington was a result of his loyalty to the US is only a partial assessment. While Blair can certainly be described as loyal,[74] he struggled to reconcile his reasons for intervention in comparison to President Bush. In contrast to US policy, which stated regime change as an objective after 9/11,[75] regime change was never considered a primary goal by the British Government until later in the campaign timeline, specifically once Blair failed to secure a second UN resolution in March 2003. As Lord Ricketts explained: "Regime change was never an overt objective. It may have been a consequence of what we [UK] were doing, but it was disarmament and respect for UN resolutions which was the motivating thing".[76] Blair's role in persuading the US to seek United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1441, as well as the UK's inability to achieve a second resolution in March 2003, will be explored later in this chapter.

Secondly, as the junior partner, the UK was the second-largest contributor of troops to Iraq and remained the only other nation involved in the planning phase (Mumford, 2017, p.161). The US supplied a total of 424,000 combat troops, making up 91 percent of the Multi-National Force-Iraq (Garden, 2003, p.703). By contrast, the UK supplied 41,000 British troops (Woodward, 2004, p.401), about one-third of non-US coalition forces (Keegan, 2004, p.66). In fact, once Basra had been captured, British troop numbers were radically reduced; an argument that was raised in the Chilcot Inquiry that the UK was ill-equipped in terms of manpower to manage the COIN operation (Chilcot, 2016a, p.109).

Beyond troop numbers, the British military's bases in Cyprus and Diego Garcia were seen as critical resources to US military planners. On January 17, 2002, General

[74] Interview with Sir David Manning, Zoom, 4 March 2022.
[75] Interview with Ambassador John Bolton, Zoom, 24 June 2022.
[76] Interview with Lord Peter Ricketts, Zoom, 23 June 2022.

Tommy Franks presented his latest draft of war plans to US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld; this option, as well as the three previous iterations, included the UK (as well as Kuwait, Qatar and Oman) providing basing rights and overflight operations (Woodward, 2004, p.82). British bases in Cyprus and Diego Garcia were also mentioned in a note to the Prime Minister from Manning, on July 19, 2002;[77] and in another memo to Manning from Matthew Rycroft, dated July 23, 2002, the UK was described as an "essential" ally to the Americans due to its strategic military bases.[78] Rycroft outlined additional options for UK involvement which included maritime and air assets as well as a land contribution of up to 40,000 troops.[79] In a note to the Prime Minister on July 19, Manning reported on the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) examination of contributing to US-led action in Iraq including options such as deploying a "Gulf War sized contribution plus naval and air forces".[80] However, Manning warned that the UK could not meet the American military timetable, stating that "the UK could not generate a Division in time for an operation in January 2003…".[81] He then continued to outline the UK's necessary conditions for military action, which included: a legal basis, an international coalition, a quiescent Israel/Palestine, a positive risk/benefit assessment and the preparation of domestic opinion.[82]

The reasons behind Blair's strategy of aligning closely to the Americans, in particular, Blair's fear of endangering the special relationship[83] as well as his objective of influencing US policy in Iraq, will be discussed later. Whether it was the "risk of repeating Suez" and losing Parliamentary support (Kettle, 2018, p.171) that loomed over No 10 or

[77] Memo from David Manning to Tony Blair, 19 July 2002, 'Iraq: Military Conditions for War', TNA.
[78] Memo from Matthew Rycroft to David Manning, 23 July 2002, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's Meeting, 23 July', DNSA.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Memo from David Manning to Tony Blair, 19 July 2002, 'Iraq: Military Conditions for War', TNA.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Interview with Sir Christopher Meyer, Zoom, 23 February 2022.

the hope of steering American decision-making that led Blair to committing the UK to a second conflict in the Middle East, both certainly featured in British policy calculations. What can be said is that Blair saw the UK's role in Iraq as supporting the exercise of US power, and through Britain's "full and unqualified" support, Blair hoped to persuade Washington "from the inside" (Chilcot, 2016a, p.52). In turn, America's alliance with the UK conferred a simulacrum of legitimacy on the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq.[84]

### 4.5 Complementarity in Iraq

Applying the smart power framework, three key insights emerge about the complementarian nature of British smart power in Iraq. Firstly, the UK sought to deploy a combination of hard military power and soft power resources, such as multilateral diplomacy through the UN and the promotion of Western liberal ideals, to shape the planning around post-war governance in Iraq. Blair had previously demonstrated that the UK military could be used as an instrument of British foreign policy (Ricketts, 2021, p.91); hence, the UK's willingness to deploy British troops to Iraq maintained its relevance with Washington. The MoD had even warned Blair that the UK ran the risk of being excluded from US planning if British ground troops were not deployed in theatre (Kettle, 2018, p.177).

In his famous 1999 Chicago speech, Blair had previously acknowledged that military hard power was an "imperfect instrument for righting humanitarian distress" but argued that "armed force is sometimes the only means of dealing with dictators" (Blair, 1999). Like Bush, Blair recognised the role of hard power to depose tyrants who posed a humanitarian and international security threat. Yet, Blair's approach to intervention in Iraq reflected a strategy based on smart power, as it did not elevate hard power above other

[84] Interview with Andrew Bacevich, Email, 30 January 2022.

tools of power and emphasised using diplomacy and other soft power tools to manage the post-intervention context. In addition to sending ground forces, the British Prime Minister sought to use soft power tools, by building an international coalition and pursuing multilateral action through the UN, which in turn, would also legitimise the use of military force. Again, Blair's belief in using military force for humanitarian purposes reflected his NRC of Britain as an 'opportunist-interventionist' power.

In sum, Blair's doctrine of international community argued that military intervention could be justified if it occurred "under the normative structures of humanitarianism, institutionalism and multilateralism" (Gibbins and Rostampour, 2019, p.92). Moreover, Blair believed that the US could legitimise its power in Iraq through multilateralism (Nye, 2003, p.69); however, the shock and anger of 9/11 still loomed in the American psyche and caused the US to rely heavily on hard military power rather than soft power tools.

### 4.51 The Bush Doctrine and Blair's Interventionism

Secondly, the US and UK diverged in their approach to intervention in Iraq, specifically the Bush administration's pursuit of unilateralism contrasted with British preferences for multilateralism that emphasised using 'softer' foreign policy tools. America's limited confidence in international law and global institutions, specifically the UN, during the build-up to invasion in March 2003, highlighted a main divergence within the alliance. Despite this disagreement, both Bush and Blair's philosophies shared similar narratives that guided their approach to intervention; specifically, the Bush Doctrine, which endorsed pre-emptive military action, dovetailed with Blair's case for legitimate intervention (Mayall, 2020, p.204).

As noted, the Bush Doctrine, codified in the 2002 US National Security Strategy (NSS), emphasised the prioritisation of American interests (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2001). Rooted in American exceptionalism, the belief that the US "possesses a providential uniqueness destined by liberty" (Barber, 2004, p.239), guided US foreign policy in Iraq by separating 'the city on a hill' against the malevolent 'axis of evil'. However, as Andrew Bacevich argued, Bush's goal of "ending tyranny in the world" through the spreading of American ideals and by waging preventive war proved to be a "self-indulgent fantasy" (2016, p.268). Although the NSS highlighted the US working with other great powers to pursue common interests, such as "defending the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants", it broadened the role of deterrence in US national security policy to include a role for pre-emptive military action specifically in the context of defeating terrorist and rogue states (The White House, 2002, p.iv). According to the NSS, the "best defence is a good offence" (ibid., p.12), and as such, the US was prepared "to stop rogue states before they are able to threaten or use WMDs" (ibid., p.18). However, as a Brookings Institution policy brief warned, the NSS failed to clarify the circumstances in which pre-emption was justified, or to separate justifiable pre-emption from unlawful aggression by states who might embrace pre-emption as "a cover for settling their own national security scores" (Daalder, et al., 2002, p.7).

In sum, the doctrine of pre-emptive self-defence, as defined in the US NSS, went beyond the traditionally narrow principle of pre-emptive self-defence, and reserved the right of a state to attack pre-emptively even without an imminent threat. Ultimately, the Bush Doctrine allowed for the US to prioritise preventative counter-terrorism efforts over personal freedom and international law. As Bush claimed before a bi-partisan audience during his State of the Union address in January 2002, "America will do what is necessary to ensure our nation's security" (Bush, 2002a). As Gallarrotti (2004) argued, the US now

became caught up in a “vicious cycle of unilateralism” (p.227) which, in turn, helped to foster an environment that worked against US interests. America’s “conduct of confrontational unilateralism” alienated itself from European allies, namely France and Germany (ibid.). According to a US cable to the FCO in March 2003, even some inside the US State Department expressed concern about “images of US unilateralism”.[85]

The Bush administration’s belief in its right to pre-emptive intervention highlighted America’s limited confidence in global institutions compared to its British ally whose foreign policy tradition placed international consensus at the forefront of intervention (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002b). Like previous interventions in Kosovo in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001, Blair understood the importance of achieving international consensus to apply military force. Again, London’s attitudes towards policy of multilateralism and international law reflected Blair’s belief in the UK’s role as the ‘influential rule of law state’.

Despite fraught relations with neo-conservatives in Washington, notably Vice President Dick Cheney, Blair worked to shift the Bush administration away from unilateralism whilst wooing both British and European opinion behind America (Dumbrell, 2006, p.155; Kettle, 2018, p.174). Before Parliament on March 18, 2003, Blair warned that inaction risked the UN’s credibility on the world stage:

> I have come to the conclusion…that the greater danger to the UN is inaction: that to pass resolution 1441 and then refuse to enforce it would do the most deadly damage to the UN’s future strength, confirming it as an instrument of diplomacy but not action, forcing nations down the very unilateralist path we wish to avoid (HC Deb 18 March 2003, c.761).

Blair feared that the international community’s failure to enforce resolution 1441, which would force Saddam to comply with UN resolutions, would further encourage the US

[85] Cable from FM Washington to FCO London, 15 March 2003, ‘Iraq’.

towards unilateralism. Like Blair, some within the White House, such as Colin Powell, also struggled to strike a delicate balance between winning the "battle for Bush's heart and mind as he attempted to balance unilateralist impulses with some international realities" (Woodward, 2002, p.410).

In combination with Powell's support for a multilateral solution, Blair's need for a compelling *casus belli* ultimately persuaded Bush to go through the UN, just as his father had done over a decade before (Freedman, 2008, p.409). Bush's speech before the UN General Assembly in September 2002, where he argued for a new UN resolution on Iraq, was a victory for Blair and Powell, albeit pyrrhic. Bush may have accepted the Blair-Powell view over the need to engage with the UN route, or at least the need to be perceived as engaging with the international community, but Washington continued to embrace a "go it alone" attitude towards Iraq, particularly after the US-UK-Spain coalition failed to secure a second UN resolution.[86] As Cheney made clear to Blair during his Middle East tour in early 2002, the US intended "to finish the job" in Iraq (Fiddes, 2020, p.113) even without political cover from the UN. The Bush administration's strategy in Iraq is perhaps best summarised by Donald Rumsfeld's remark he reportedly made to Geoff Hoon, the UK Defence Secretary: "It would be nice to have you Brits along, but we don't actually need you".[87]

### 4.52 "Tell me how this ends"[88]

[86] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2002.
[87] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2002; Interview with Sir Christopher Meyer, Zoom, 23 February 2022.
[88] General David Petraeus' 2003 quote 'Tell me how this end' has become one of the most famous quotes on US operations in Iraq. In 2004, Petraeus was chosen to lead both the Multi-National Security Transition Command and the NATO Training Mission in Iraq, and co-authored the US Army's manual on counterinsurgency warfare. He is widely regarded as having turned the US campaign around in Iraq.

The US and UK also diverged over the planning of post-war reconstruction efforts in Iraq, specifically the prioritisation of nation-building and how it would be implemented. US forces suffered from "American denial syndrome" in Iraq, a long-established pattern of American intervention, whereby the US fostered an ambivalent attitude to post-war "governance operations" and reconstruction efforts (Schadlow, 2017). Dr. Nadia Schadlow, who first coined the term to describe America's denial of governance operations as integral to war, has argued that "when civilian and military leaders debate the use of force, they must also determine whether the US has the will, organisations and resources to go from combat successes to achieving political outcomes" (2017, p.12). The Bush administration's over-confidence in winning the war in Iraq, what Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster has called "strategic narcissism" (2020, p.246), resulted in the inability for the US and its Coalition partners to consolidate military gains politically and to adapt to an evolving conflict situation. As McMaster argued: "Removing Saddam without a post-war plan released deep forces of sectarian violence into motion" (ibid., p.244).

Washington's "deep-seated aversion to peacekeeping and nation-building" (Meyer, 2005, p.226) after major combat operations had ceased in Iraq clashed with attitudes in London. Interviews with several British and American civilian and military figures suggested that US-UK tensions stemmed from disagreement over the evaluation of post-conflict peace in Iraq.[89] In particular, they reflected that the UK remained sceptical of the anticipated "euphoria" post-Saddam in comparison to their American counterparts, whose "naïve and wishful thinking" fostered a reluctance to accept that other factors, namely the Shia and Sunni tensions, also determined the nature of the post-war strategic context.[90]

[89] Interview with British diplomat and former member of the UK National Security Council, London, 22 July 2022, name anonymised to protect individual's identity.
[90] Ibid.

Similarly, Manning argued that the US administration was driven by the "naïve" belief that "democracy would break out" and "everybody would rejoice" once Saddam was removed from power.[91] US plans to grow "a modern, socially liberal state in the middle of Mesopotamia…the democracy in a box…was a fanciful idea", stated one British military officer.[92] This divergence in expectations caused friction within the alliance when such expectations could never be met.

Months before the launch of OIF, the British had consistently pressured the Americans to prioritise planning for the re-establishment of political order in Iraq. As Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, who commanded US troops in Iraq from 2007 to 2008, stated: "When we first went to war in Iraq, the British government understood that we needed to consolidate gains and they kept trying to get the Bush administration to rethink it."[93] Reflecting on a meeting between No 10 and the White House, McMaster highlighted conflicting attitudes towards nation-building:

> On the screen, you had the Situation Room in Washington, and the meeting room in No 10 and Tony Blair kept asking the question, 'We have to ask ourselves what more can we do? What more can we do?' And you had the grumpy Rumsfeld there scowling, who just wanted to get out.[94]

The Bush administration's preoccupation with conflict management over conflict resolution was in direct variance to the Blair government's approach. As Meyer noted, the US had trained its military forces exclusively for warfighting, not peacekeeping; this was seen in previous interventions, such as the Balkans, where the Americans had a proclivity to renege on peacekeeping duties (Meyer, 2005, p.226). As Lord Jay reflected:

> If you're going to go and do military intervention and change the government, you've also got be concerned with what comes afterwards, you've got to be concerned with building something in its place…there was a real difference…between Rumsfeld's approach and the British approach.[95]

[91] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.
[92] Interview with General Sir Simon Mayall, London, 21 July 2022.
[93] Interview with Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, Zoom, 2 June 2002.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2022.

By contrast, the Blair government's strategy followed the long-established British foreign policy tradition of helping facilitate peacekeeping operations. Blair's previous success in facilitating peace outcomes in Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Northern Ireland had fuelled his own belief that the Anglo-American alliance had to tackle the root causes of extremism and to produce effective post-war reconstruction programs that would facilitate stability in Iraq (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2002c). As he wrote in his memoir: "To win…does not require simply a military strategy to defeat an enemy that is fighting us. It requires a whole new geopolitical framework. It requires nation-building" (Blair, 2010, p.349). These accounts suggest that Blair's goal included re-establishing the Iraqi political order, not just achieving military victory alone. Whether the UK government actually delivered post-war reconstruction efforts in Iraq, however, is another question altogether and one that lies outside the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, British policy was guided by the belief that to win the war in Iraq, one must win the peace; a philosophy not shared as widely by US policymakers in Iraq.[96]

Contrary to much of the research on Anglo-American intervention in Iraq, US attitudes towards nation-building were far from uniform. Robert Gates, who replaced Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defence in 2006, has maintained that Bush saw nation-building as a fundamental element of the war.[97] "Bush's view was that if we're going to use military force, then we need to leave the country better than we found it."[98] This was confirmed by John Bolton who argued that nation-building, while it was not originally a core objective of the US strategy in Iraq, had become a priority to the administration as a result of pressure from London.[99] Moreover, Gates argued that Rumsfeld, who opposed US

[96] Interview with General Sir Simon Mayall, London, 21 July 2022.
[97] Interview with Secretary Robert Gates, Zoom, 7 July 2022.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Interview with Ambassador John Bolton, Zoom, 24 June 2022.

involvement in nation-building in both Afghanistan and Iraq, was the exception and not the rule in the administration.[100]

Nevertheless, Rumsfeld's influence was far-reaching, which explains the disastrous decisions that were made with the establishment of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Baghdad in May 2003. Formerly the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), the CPA was an inadequately resourced body responsible for facilitating the transition of a post-Saddam Iraq (Bacevich, 2016, p.256). However, according to Gates, Rumsfeld devolved his nation-building responsibilities to US Ambassador Paul Bremer,[101] who was a novice when it came to Middle East affairs. This thesis does not examine the post-war period in Iraq, however, it is important to note that Bremer ignored much of the UK's guidance on post-war planning (Chilcot, 2016a, pp.89-90), in particular, viewing the CPA as the authority for running the country (Cross, 2013, p.77).

Two policies that Bremer would later implement, the disbandment of the Iraqi army and de-Baathification, were particularly problematic and fed the insurgency. The dissolving of Saddam's army and security structures, in particular, would lead to a rapid deterioration of security which alienated the Sunni community and fed the insurgency. Moreover, the process of de-Baathification purged Iraq's state institutions of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party members which led to the collapse of Iraq's state functions and increased polarisation within Iraqi politics (ICTJ, 2013). As Zinn argus, de-Baathification "eliminated the top tiers" of the Baath party from civil service, thus destroying the "institutional memory of all Iraqi institutions" (Zinn, 2016, p.80). As such, US and Coalition forces would be tasked with establishing a new government from the ground up

[100] Interview with Secretary Robert Gates, Zoom, 7 July 2022.
[101] Ibid.

amidst a rapidly deteriorating security environment that ultimately enabled a strong insurgency to develop and "pave the way for the beginnings of the Islamic State in Iraq" (ibid).

Again, this thesis does not explore these policies and their implications for establishing a post-war democratic system in Iraq, but it does emphasise the US' reticence to commit to post-war reconstruction efforts. As Barber argued, America's "attention-deficit isolationism" drove its strategy to prioritise military victory instead of "staying the imperial course" by re-establishing political order in Iraq (2004, p.240). Similar to Presidents who had gone before him, notably Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter, who sought to re-make the Middle East in America's image; Bush sought to protect American interests from the evils of "rogue regimes and their terrorist allies" by using military power to reconfigure the region. In a sense, Francis Fukuyama was right; America and Britain had fought for liberal democracy in a post-9/11 world. The trouble was, they could not agree on prioritising and resourcing their democratic experiment in Iraq.

**4.6 The role of context**

By supporting the US-led campaign OEF in Afghanistan, the Blair government had achieved unparalleled access to American decision-makers. However, the context in which Blair sought to influence US policy preferences in Iraq vastly differed from the build up to intervention in Afghanistan. The UK continued to play the role of the 'transatlantic bridge' between the US and Europe during the build-up to OIF. Unlike Afghanistan, however, where there was a clear logic for intervention, Iraq lacked the same political and legal clarity to create a *casus belli* (Mayall, 2020, p.211). Blair's whirlwind diplomatic tour immediately following September 11, where he drummed up support for the United States and the 'war on terror', meeting with Chancellor Schroder in Germany and President

Chirac in France, had been an overwhelming success. But in contrast to Afghanistan, which "began on a wave of solidarity with the US around the world" (Ricketts, 2021, p.59), the assumption that Blair could generate the same level of support amongst world leaders over Iraq, particularly European partners, proved illusory. Nonetheless, as both a pro-European and Atlanticist Prime Minister, Blair believed that the UK should "seek the best of both worlds and be a bridge between Europe and North America" (Mangold, 2002, p.26). Thus, Blair continued to play the role of a 'transatlantic bridge' between the US and Europe in the hope of bringing the Europeans on board while influencing US decision-making (Fiddes, 2020, p.119).

However, tensions between Europe and the US grew with the announcement of the Bush Doctrine. During the President's annual State of the Union address on January 29, 2002, Bush delivered his 'axis of evil' speech, in which he grouped Iraq together with other "hostile regimes", specifically Iran and North Korea (Bush, 2001h). According to Sir Christopher Meyer, the reaction in London was one of shock; in Europe, it was "almost universally hostile" (2005, p.233). On September 20, 2001, four months prior to the speech, Bush had delivered a similar message to a joint session of Congress, where he depicted America's enemy as not just terrorist groups, but also the "rogue states" that harboured them and were believed to have been capable of helping al-Qaeda (Bush, 2001d). The 'axis of evil' speech marked a new phase in US-led GWOT. In the shadow of 9/11, Bush made it his mission to destroy what he framed as the nexus between terrorism and WMD, even if that meant resorting to pre-emptive action. Thus, under the weight of US unilateralism, transatlantic solidarity began to fracture (Meyer, 2005, p.234) as the US and Europe pursued divergent approaches to intervention in Iraq, with the US advocating military force while Europe increasingly favoured a multilateral approach with diplomacy to the fore.

Against this backdrop, Blair attempted to perform a "political balancing act wherein he sought to be America's best friend and a committed European…" (Dunn, 2008, p.1133). Moreover, he tried to bridge the gap between American militantism and European scepticism, by empathising with the Americans' "strategic anxiety over terrorism and WMD" (HC Deb 18 March 2003, c.771) and using the UN as the political mechanism to address both. For Blair, the UN was the best option to build a strong coalition in support of the US to tackle the threat which Saddam posed to international security.

Some within Parliament have emphasised the challenges of Blair's approach. As Lord Jay explained:

> Blair didn't fully understand that it was difficult to be very close to the Europeans on the one hand and, on the other hand, to be very close to the Americans, because sometimes American policy and European policy would diverge.[102]

He elaborated further: "The problem is…you weren't building a bridge, you were falling into the middle of the Atlantic".[103] True to Lord Jay's statement, Blair's bridge-building came to a screeching halt when disagreements arose within the Security Council over resolution 1441, and in particular, whether it permitted the use of military force to disarm Saddam if he failed to comply with UN obligations. Neo-conservatives in Washington, who had repeatedly pushed for regime change, became increasingly frustrated by their European allies' reluctance to support US military action against Iraq (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2001). Equally, European partners, specifically France and Germany, grew wary of the Bush administration's unilateralist outlook and perceived lack of concern for international agreements (ibid.). This tension within the transatlantic alliance was addressed in a letter to Bush, dated six days after OIF began: "The problem is…a distorted view of the US is clouding the enormous attraction of the fundamental goal…the problem is we're not communicating with the rest of the world in a way they

[102] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2022.
[103] Ibid.

understand."[104] Blair's solution to the European perception of US power included a reframe of the problem and, in particular, how the US was perceived by Europe. Blair urged Bush: "Keep the policy…change the presentation. People want to feel and see the US reaching out, explaining, trying to seek a collective way through, even if it can't always be achieved".[105]

### 4.7 Utilising the 'special relationship'

This section examines the third element of the analytical framework of smart power: how the UK utilised its perception of the special relationship to advance its foreign policy interests by influencing US intervention in Iraq. Blair regarded the UK's alliance with the US as 'special' insofar as it was believed that the alliance could be employed instrumentally to sustain British power. There were two policies in particular, that Blair hoped to influence US policy: pursuing a multilateral strategy through the UN to disarm Saddam and re-engaging in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) to solve the Israel-Palestine conflict. These will both now be examined in the following sections.

#### 4.71 Disarming Saddam

The US and the UK both shared the belief that Saddam Hussein posed an imminent threat to global security, and therefore needed to be disarmed of rogue WMD in accordance with UN obligations under resolution 1441 (Bacevich, 2016, p.238). London and Washington were particularly concerned about the proliferation of WMD and other weapons ending up in the hands of terrorist groups, like al-Qaeda. In a speech before the UN, in September 2002, President Bush reiterated America's objective to "hold Iraq to account" in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions (Bush, 2002b). That same

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[104] Letter to George Bush from Tony Blair, 26 March 2003, 'The Fundamental Goal', TNA.
[105] Ibid.

month, in a statement to Parliament, Blair presented Iraq's past, current and future capabilities as evidence of the potential threat from Iraq's WMD (Chilcot, 2016a, p.18). Blair argued there was an overwhelming case for disarming Saddam, stating before the House of Commons: "His weapons of mass destruction programme is active, detailed and growing. The policy of containment is not working. The weapons of mass destruction programme is not shut down; it is up and running now" (HC Deb 24 September 2002, c.3). Even eight months after invasion, Blair continued to describe Iraq as "a global threat…a test case of how determined we [US and UK] were to confront the threat".[106]

Although united about disarming Saddam, Washington and London diverged about how to achieve this objective. The Blair government advised against taking unilateral military action in Iraq (Chilcot, 2016a) and instead encouraged the Bush administration to build international support by working through the UN to disarm Saddam (Archick, 2005, p.10). More specifically, Blair sought to convince the US that war in Iraq, which many within the Bush administration believed was inevitable, could be avoided through diplomacy (Brown, 2010, p.256). After UNSCR 1441 was passed in November 2002, Blair urged Bush to pursue a second resolution, specifically following debates in the UNSC about whether military intervention was justified. Blair believed that a fresh resolution would unite the international community (Blair, 2010, p.423) and demonstrate that the US was not "going it alone" (Fiddes, 2020, p.120).

In contrast to the UK government's strategy of disarmament through UN resolutions, the Bush administration pursued regime change (Chilcot, 2016a, p.6). As Bolton noted, US policy had supported regime change long before September 11: "Saddam was unfinished business…even in the late 1990s…it was a policy objective of the United

[106] Letter to George Bush from Tony Blair, 5 October 2003, 'Refocusing Public Opinion of Iraq War', TNA.

States to overthrow Saddam Hussein…”.[107] According to Bolton, regime change was the only way to prevent another 9/11: “If you want to eliminate the threat, you’ve got to have a change of regime…”.[108] By contrast, Lawrence Freedman argued that “regime change had long been US policy for Iraq, but not by means of invasion” (2008, p.398).

Bush’s framing of Iraq as a moral war was viewed by those within the administration as providing political cover for intervention; this narrative is seen throughout many of Bush’s public speeches. For example, President Bush’s Manichean ‘axis of evil’ speech divided the world into civilised nations against “rogue regimes and their terrorist allies” (Bush, 2001f; Bush, 2001h). Bush also delivered an ultimatum to the international community in the build-up to Iraq: “No nation can be neutral in this conflict because no civilised nation can be secure in a world threatened by terror” (Bush, 2001f). Furthermore, Iraq was even framed by some within Washington as a “Holy War 101”.[109]

The Bush administration’s ‘war on terror’ rhetoric was not adopted by London, but Blair was as convinced as Bush that Iraq was as much a fight over values as it was a fight to protect international security. In a note to Bush on March 26, 2003, Blair wrote:

> Countries that are free and democratic are countries unlikely to threaten us. The terrorists and rogue states…come together in hatred of our values…they don’t hate the US by accident. They hate it for what it stands for. So our fundamental goal is to spread our values of freedom, democracy, tolerance and the rule of law…ridding Saddam is the real prize.[110]

When it came to intervention, Blair was both a pragmatist and a moralist. He saw military intervention as not only the right solution to protect British security, but also the means by which to fight for “the greater good”.[111] Much of Blair’s willingness to support the US-led

[107] Interview with Ambassador John Bolton, Zoom, 24 June 2022.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Letter to Doug Feith from Donald Rumsfeld, 29 November 2003, ‘War on Terror, DNSA.
[110] Letter to George Bush from Tony Blair, 26 March 2003, ‘The Fundamental Goal’, TNA.
[111] Interview with British diplomat and former member of the UK National Security Council, London, 22 July 2022, name anonymised to protect individual’s identity.

invasion stemmed from the belief that Saddam was an "evil" and "unpredictable" man who had used chemical weapons before; the Iraq question was not just a political piece, but a moral piece as well.[112] While No 10 had not explicitly communicated a "you are either with us or against us" (Bush, 2001f) narrative, in that same March 2003 note, Blair argued: "Defeating it [terrorism] requires us to construct a global agenda around which sensible nations can unite; and making any state that sponsors it feel real heat".[113] Although in agreement about Saddam posing an international security threat, Blair's principal dilemma would be convincing Bush, who was largely in thrall to his own neoconservatives, that Iraq was a problem best solved multilaterally through an international framework.

There was not one specific moment where Washington settled on regime change in Iraq, but the decision evolved over time. As Bush's foreign policy adviser, Condoleezza Rice, stated: "There wasn't a flash moment. There's no decision meeting" (ibid.). Equally, Colin Powell recalled that a "moment when we all made our recommendations and [Bush] made a decision" never occurred within National Security Council (NSC) meetings (DeYoung, 2006, p.429). However, there were some within Bush's inner circle, specifically Donald Rumsfeld and Douglas Feith, who wanted to remove Saddam in the immediate aftermath of September 11. According to notes taken by Stephen Cambone, aide to Donald Rumsfeld, just hours after the 9/11 attacks, Rumsfeld instructed US Air Force General Richard Meyers, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to find information on a potential connection between Saddam and Osama bin Laden. The note said: "Best info fast. Judge whatever good enough [to] hit SH at same time – not only UBL" (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004, pp.334-335). Evidently, some in Washington had set their sights on Baghdad not long after the

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Letter to George Bush from Tony Blair, 26 March 2003, 'The Fundamental Goal', TNA.

twin towers fell. However, Bush was encouraged to hold off on invading Iraq until after the US successfully removed the Taliban from Afghanistan; as mentioned, Blair was partly responsible for influencing Bush to focus solely on Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the debate in London about regime change was also evolving. Gradually, as WMD intelligence proved illusory, the narrative pivoted from disarming Saddam of WMD to liberating Iraqis from the repressive rule of Iraq's dictator. As Blair stated before the Scottish Labour party in Glasgow in February 2003: "The moral case against war has a moral answer – it is the moral case for removing Saddam" (Blair, 2003). Saddam's brutality was certainly undisputed; Iraq had used CW against Iran and his own Kurdish population in the Iran-Iraq War during the 1980s and was known to have an active nuclear program up until at least the early 1990s.[114] However, some within London, had doubts. Lord Ricketts argued that the UK government could not adopt a policy of regime change "partly for legal reasons…it might be the outcome, but it wasn't the obvious purpose".[115]

There has been much speculation about when the UK adopted a policy of regime change in Iraq. Interviews with former government officials from Blair's government, including Sir David Manning and Lord Peter Ricketts, maintained that the UK government's policy towards Iraq remained focused on disarmament through the UN, although Blair welcomed Saddam's removal from power as a positive biproduct of intervention.[116] Others like Meyer argued that London changed course in Spring 2002, and claimed that Blair first publicly embraced the policy of regime change at the Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas: "America is fighting for those values, and

[114] Interview with Lord Peter Ricketts, Zoom, 23 June 2022.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Interview with Sir David Manning, iPhone, 8 July 2022; Interview with Lord Peter Ricketts, Zoom, 23 June 2022.

however tough, we will fight with her" (Meyer, 2005, p.247). In another statement of solidarity with America, Meyer argued, Blair had signalled the transition of British policy from disarmament to supporting US-led regime change (ibid.). However, as Manning noted, there was a significant difference between Britain giving political support and pledging a military commitment. "One of the reasons Blair wanted to give Bush his political support was to persuade him to go back to the United Nations".[117] According to Manning, Blair's unqualified political support helped persuade Bush to take multilateral action through the UN and to pursue a second resolution. "The whole force of British policy between the Spring of 2002 and September 2002 was to persuade the President, in the face of a lot of opposition in his own government, to go back to the UN and to ask for a new resolution…".[118]

### 4.72 Pursuing peace in the Middle East

In addition to upholding the will of the UN through 1441 (Woodward, 2004, p.360), under Blair's leadership, London encouraged Washington to re-engage in the search for a peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict which, as noted, Blair saw as linked to the liberation of Iraq. As Sir Christopher Meyer, UK Ambassador to the US from 1997 to 2003, reflected: "One of the first questions we asked the Bush administration, Condi Rice in particular, was how much importance are you going to give Israel-Palestine?"[119] In a note to Bush, dated October 5, 2003, Blair urged the President to "carry on with MEPP" arguing that if Washington "presented it on a pre-prepared basis to Israel and the Palestinians…it would give us a chance and above all, it would force the world to confront the fact that the problem is terrorism".[120] No 10 saw the threat of Islamic

[117] Interview with Sir David Manning, iPhone, 8 July 2022.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Interview with Sir Christopher Meyer, Zoom, 23 February 2022.
[120] Letter to George Bush from Tony Blair, 5 October 2003, 'Refocusing Public Opinion of Iraq War', TNA.

extremism as too inter-twined with the Israel-Palestine conflict. As Manning stated: "You cannot tackle the whole question of terrorism and extremism…in the Middle East in different silos…Blair believed that the Arab street would never be satisfied as long as we weren't seen as addressing the issue of justice for the Palestinians balanced by the security for the Israelis".[121]

Even as the drumbeats of war grew louder in Washington, Blair frequently pressured Bush to produce a roadmap for peace between Israel and Palestine.[122] According to Manning, Israel and Palestine remained a key priority for Blair, and "despite all the other pressures, he [Blair] never stopped focusing on it."[123] Not only was the MEPP a key priority for Blair, but some have asserted that it was a necessary pre-condition in exchange for British support in Iraq. According to Major General Andrew Stewart, who served as General Officer Commanding Multi-National Division in Southern Iraq from 2003 to 2004, the British "played a straight line with the Americans", stating that London needed "a green light on five things" before they could go to war in Iraq, one of which included "discernible progress on the Middle East peace process" (Stewart, 2013, p.79). However, some within No 10 have claimed that the MEPP was not a precondition, but rather a matter of safeguarding Western security against future terrorist attacks. As Manning stated, London "squeezed the roadmap out of Washington...for him [Blair] the Middle East was not an option. It was fundamental to regional stability".[124]

Blair's prioritisation of resolving "the perennial issue of Israel and the Palestinians" (Meyer, 2005, p.232) seemed to pay off, at least initially, in the immediate aftermath of the invasion of Iraq (Archick, 2005, p.10). In April 2003, Washington reaffirmed its

[121] Interview with Sir David Manning, iPhone, 8 July 2022.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.

commitment to the publication and implementation of a roadmap, and expressed a desire for progress based on a two state solution (HC Deb 14 April 2003, cc.615-634). President Bush's announcement on a "road map for peace in the Middle East" in the Rose Garden on March 14, 2003, was seen as "another concession to Blair, who had pressed him [Bush] to delay the peace plan until the Iraqi issue was resolved" (Woodward, 2004, p.347). Although No 10 persuaded the White House to commit to re-engaging in the MEPP; the US commitment was ultimately inhibited by other external factors, in particular, Bush's scepticism of Arafat.[125] However, the US' increased movement on the MEPP does demonstrate that Bush understood that US success in Iraq was inextricably linked to addressing the Israel-Palestine conflict. This highlights an example of the UK demonstrating agency within the alliance, and that British influence exercised some influence on the US agenda in the Middle East.

### 4.73 Amplifying Britain's leadership role

Blair also sought to use the Anglo-American alliance to sustain and to project British power in a post-9/11 world. Blair believed that Britain's decision to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the US in Iraq would give the UK the opportunity to "contribute to history"[126], thus providing the UK with an enhanced leadership role on the world stage. As General Sir Simon Mayall put it: "As the second largest contributor…what we automatically got…was a whole host of deputy decisions…The more you're in it [alliance], the more you can expect to have command opportunities or deputy posts…it gives you access and visibility…".[127] Blair hoped that by showing solidarity with the US in Iraq, London would be granted privileged access to US decision-making.

[125] Ibid.
[126] Interview with Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Zoom, 19 July 2022.
[127] Interview with General Sir Simon Mayall, London, 21 July 2022.

Thus, Blair's solidarity with Washington was not purely sentimental. As noted, Blair understood the political salience of "staying close to the Americans", advice he had been given by Margaret Thatcher[128] prior to beginning of his premiership as Prime Minister. Following in the footsteps of several British Prime Ministers before him – Anthony Eden, Alec Douglas-Home and Margaret Thatcher – all of whom treated the maintenance of the Anglo-American alliance as a top national security policy, Blair's belief in Britain's role as America's 'faithful ally' saw close relations with Washington as the key to sustaining British power in a post-9/11 world. Interviews with former British government officials revealed that the 'special relationship' was described as "the centre to British security"[129], "an ingrained instinct"[130], the only means to "make true Britain's future ambitions"[131] and to "preserve the status quo, to protect the international order".[132] But as Manning also highlighted, "Central though the US-UK relationship was, Blair also believed that it was essential that Britain should be a central player in the EU."[133] Nonetheless, this thesis suggests that, to a certain extent, Blair ascribed to the belief in American exceptionalism. As he stated at the Bush Presidential Library in Texas, in April 2002: "American power affects the world fundamentally…Stand aside or engage, it never fails to affect" (Blair, 2002). For Blair, Britain's future was directly tied to US power.

As such, London sought to use its close proximity to Washington to encourage transatlantic ties between the US and its other Western allies, notably Europe, thereby giving Britain a seat at the table in both Washington and Brussels. As Sir Nigel Sheinwald, who served as foreign policy and defence advisor to Tony Blair from 2003 to 2007, stated: "America did look to us [UK] to give them particular insights on Europe and vice

[128] Interview with Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Zoom, 19 July 2022.
[129] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2022.
[130] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.
[131] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

versa."[134] Reflecting on conversations between London and Brussels, Sheinwald stated: "Europeans would be asking Blair to interpret Bush or bits of American policy. They saw us as having a prime ability to…get inside American heads and influence them…the Americans would look to the UK…to protect their interests in those negotiations…".[135] Britain's role as the transatlantic bridge between America and Europe also filtered down from the political level to the military level. As General Sir John McColl reflected: "The American military colleagues…had difficulty understanding other allies and the Europeans, so they would definitely use the Brits to communicate with other allies, and the other allies would use the Brits if they wanted the Americans to pay attention…".[136]

Blair also believed Iraq was the UK's "moment to define international politics for the next generation"[137] and, alongside the US, the UK could lead the international community against the threat of Islamist terrorism. For Blair, the reason for joint intervention was not solely about Iraq but it was "a comprehensive worldview"[138] to tackle a series of other global crises. In a private memo to Bush in March 2003, just six days after OIF began, Blair outlined his vision to create a "true post-cold war world order"[139] and implored the President to help create "a global agenda around which we can unite the world".[140] Blair believed that for Bush to "maximise his case", the President needed to build international consensus, preferably through the UN (Kampfner, 2004, p.168). As Sheinwald stated: "What Blair was trying to get…was a joint understanding of the way the world was working…his antidote for that was a much more broadly based international strategy led by the US and UK…".[141] Blair saw the "fundamental goal" of Anglo-

[134] Interview with Sir Nigel Sheinwald, London, 21 July 2022.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Interview with General Sir John McColl, iPhone, 4 April 2022.
[137] Letter to George Bush from Tony Blair, 26 March 2003, 'The Fundamental Goal', TNA.
[138] Letter to George Bush from Tony Blair, 5 October 2003, 'Refocusing Public Opinion of Iraq War', TNA.
[139] Letter to George Bush from Tony Blair, 26 March 2003, 'The Fundamental Goal', TNA.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Interview with Sir Nigel Sheinwald, London, 21 July 2022.

American intervention in Iraq as part of a wider agenda to tackle other global crises. Blair sought to "surround Iraq by other policies, such as the Middle East Peace Process, development funding particularly for Africa and action on climate change, and make the question on the table 'bigger' so that we're [US-UK] judged by a broader set of interconnected policies which would find greater resonance in the international community than Iraq alone."[142]

Additionally, the UK thought the removal of Saddam from power would open the door to other strategic opportunities in the Arab world. London believed that the liberation of Iraq provided a new context in the Middle East in which the UK, alongside the US, could make progress on a lasting peace process (HC Deb 14 April 2003, c.621). As one Bush administration official put it: "The road to the entire Middle East goes through Baghdad" (Bacevich, 2016, p.243). Intervention would not only make it easier to confront other state sponsors of terrorism, such as Pakistan, but regime change in Iraq would position the Anglo-American alliance to orchestrate change elsewhere in the Middle East.

In sum, the Blair government viewed Anglo-American intervention in Iraq was "a galvanising moment"[143] where the UK could "play a role in the international community and try to…tackle some of these massive difficulties like the Middle East Peace Process."[144] Iraq provided Blair with an opportunity to re-imagine the role of the international community, specifically the UK's role in it, in accordance with Blair's own doctrine of international community (Fiddes, 2020, p.129). As in Afghanistan, the UK hoped to piggy-back on American power in Iraq to sustain Britain's influence on the world stage.[145] As such, Britain's relationship with America, one that has consistently featured

[142] Ibid.
[143] Interview with Sir David Manning, iPhone, 8 July 2022.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.

patterns of cooperation and competition for decades, became increasingly co-dependent during Iraq.

### 4.8 The politics of personal relations

This section highlights another key facet of the smart power framework: the critical role personal relationships have played in Britain's influence of US policy in Iraq. As Mayall argued, the US-UK alliance is "a long-standing institutional relationship built on personal relationships".[146] No other relationship has enjoyed the same depth of engagement across its military, intelligence and political systems as the Anglo-American alliance. However, it is the personal relationships between high-ranking officials, in particular, that have made the Anglo-American relationships qualitatively special. As Manning reflected about Blair: "He [Blair] saw himself as a valued and trusted interlocutor…he felt that he had a good relationship and that Bush liked Blair."[147]

As a result of Blair's personal understanding of Britain's role within the special relationship, and to preserve the alliance itself, the UK joined the US-led intervention in Iraq. However, as Porter (2010) has argued, the UK's "grand bargain" policy towards the US, was misguided. Some like Sir Richard Dalton have contested the notion of 'specialness' and have argued that the 'special relationship' is an "extremely outmoded" construct;[148] preferring to describe the alliance as an "easier relationship".[149] Ultimately, this thesis has revealed how the 'specialness' of Britain's partnership with America has largely depended on its utility. As the Bush-Blair relationship demonstrates, "good

[146] Interview with General Sir Simon Mayall, London, 21 July 2022.
[147] Interview with Sir David Manning, iPhone, 8 July 2022.
[148] Interview with Sir Richard Dalton, Zoom, 17 May 2022.
[149] Ibid.

relations between ministers matter",[150] but it raises further questions - at what cost and to what end?

Against this backdrop of close prime ministerial-presidential relations, the norm – 'come what may' – evolved from Britain's inter-operable relationship with America and defined the power dynamics between both countries in the run-up to Iraq. As in Afghanistan, Iraq demonstrated that British policy had become increasingly tied to American military priorities. The 'come what may' norm is best illustrated by Blair's private note to Bush, on July 28, 2002, in which he sought to persuade the President to build a global coalition and to outline a framework for action through the UN (Chilcot, 2016a, p.15). It was Blair's remark to Bush – "I will be with you, whatever"[151] – that has generated the most controversy, especially as the contents of Blair's note had not been discussed previously with his Cabinet colleagues (ibid., p.16).

Much speculation surrounds the exact meaning behind Blair's note, and particularly the exact timing of Blair's military commitment. Some have argued that Blair "threw his hand in with Bush" as early as Spring 2002 during a visit to Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas (Fiddes, 2020, p.113). According to journalist Bob Woodward, Bush settled on regime change at the Crawford summit in April 2002, having reportedly declared: "I have made up my mind that Saddam needs to go" (2004, p.119). Similarly, James Fiddes has claimed that, by April 2002, Blair reconciled that Iraq was a "price well worth paying to demonstrate his credentials to the White House" (2020, p.114). Sir Christopher Meyer maintained that, by Spring 2002, Blair had already made the decision,

[150] Ibid.
[151] Note to George W. Bush from Tony Blair, 28 July 2002, 'Note on Iraq', TNA.

although not publicly, to support regime change (Meyer, 2005, p.241). This claim, however, has been disputed.

Sir David Manning, Blair's private secretary and one of the few officials who accompanied Blair to Bush's ranch at Crawford said that, as far as he knew, Blair gave no specific assurance at that meeting that he would deploy British forces in support of a US invasion. During an interview, Manning commented: "I have never seen evidence that would support such an assertion. Blair said nothing to me either at or after the Crawford meeting that would substantiate such a claim." In addition to Blair's faith in multilateral diplomacy, Manning cited domestic pressures as evidence that the UK was far from committing British forces to Iraq.

> Until much later that summer, ministers were being advised by the Chiefs of Staff that a military commitment would be very difficult even if you wanted to make one because we were expecting the strike of the firemen…British troops would have to be deployed to use all the firefighting equipment.[152]

Regardless of whether Blair had conclusively decided to support regime change in Spring 2002, at Crawford, the British Prime Minister outlined several considerations that were viewed as essential for Britain's participation in military action (Chilcot, 2016a, pp.13-14) which included building a coalition through the UN and re-engaging the US in the MEPP.[153] The conditionality of British support was reiterated in a note from Manning to Blair which stated that: "The UK would support military action to bring about regime change provided that certain conditions were met".[154] In addition to a "viable military plan", Manning referenced specific conditions necessary for UK military action and participation, including: "justification/legal base for war; an international coalition; a quiescent Israel/Palestine; a positive risk/benefit assessment; and the preparation of

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[152] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Memo to Tony Blair from David Manning, 19 July 2002, 'Iraq: Conditions for Military Action', TNA.

domestic opinion".[155] By contrast, Meyer observed that the "preconditions became what would be nice to have rather than what had to happen" (2005, p.248).

While it is difficult to ascertain whether Blair's conditions were considered non-negotiable or not, correspondence between Blair and Bush, in particular the July 28, 2002, note revealed a willingness from Blair to pledge his political support to the US, intending to steer Washington away from unilateralism and pursue a multilateral solution in Iraq. This suggests that Blair's personal convictions and empathy for the US played a strong role in his decision-making. As Manning stated: "He [Blair] felt that he had given his word, and he said publicly America can't be allowed to stand alone. It can't be left, always, with the toughest things to do".[156]

Still, Blair's declaration of support, "I'll be with you, whatever",[157] perpetuated a 'come what may' norm within the Anglo-American alliance whereby the UK committed to be there "when the shooting starts" (Dunne, 2004), even at the risk of the British military becoming over-stretched. Moreover, this norm maintained the belief that the US and UK were united in a shared sense of endeavour as they faced "a defining moral and existential struggle…that kept them locked together"[158] in a post-9/11 world order. Casson defined this norm within the alliance as:

> This instinct to always reach for each other's partnership when we're adventuring in the world, especially in military terms. We assumed to always be doing things together…that was a big part of Tony Blair's rationale…he was quite convinced he wanted to get rid of Saddam Hussein anyways, but he felt that also the UK should just be there alongside the US.[159]

For Blair, Iraq was a collective security problem, and not solely an American problem. The 'come what may' norm demonstrates another exercise of British smart

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[155] Ibid.
[156] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.
[157] Note to George W. Bush from Tony Blair, 28 July 2002, 'Note on Iraq', TNA.
[158] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.
[159] Ibid.

power as Blair's belief in Britain's role as America's 'faithful ally' affected his decision to pledge support in Iraq. As such, the UK found itself, alongside its superpower ally, invading another country in the Middle East in March 2003; it was the first time the UK had launched a full-scale invasion of another sovereign nation since Suez in 1956. As Sir Richard Dalton put it: "The special relationship encouraged this idea, that proved so disastrous in 2003, that if the Americans called, we [UK] will always be alongside."[160]

The role of personal relations between leaders is also reflected by Bush's decision to seek a second UN resolution, one that was not made purely out of principle, but it was also personally motivated to help Blair, who faced serious political pressure at home. The close personal relationship between Bush and Blair should not be underestimated here. Blair's resolve displayed in the weeks and months post-9/11 had made an impression on the American President, such that when Blair asked Bush if he would "try one more time" to secure a second UN resolution (Woodward, 2004, p.377), Bush prioritised achieving diplomatic cover to the extent that he had ordered Rumsfeld and Franks to delay troop movements (ibid., p.319).

As polls showed that support in the UK had hit an all-time low with opposition to the war reaching a high of 47 percent (Fiddes, 2020, p.120), Bush understood that Blair needed the second resolution politically. While Bush opposed securing a second resolution (even Powell deemed it unnecessary), Bush came through on his friend's 'favour' (Woodward, 2004, pp.296-297). According to Woodward, Bush assured Blair: "If that's what you need, we will go flat out to try and help you get it" (ibid., p.297). Moreover, Bush did not want the US to be seen as "going it alone" in Iraq (Fiddes, 2020, p.120). Bush was concerned about losing his "chief ally" and the impact of losing Blair on the war

[160] Interview with Sir Richard Dalton, Zoom, 17 May 2022.

against Saddam (Woodward, 2004, p.338). In fact, Bush's fear that Blair risked losing his own government led him to offer the British prime minister a way out – the option to withdraw from military invasion and to participate instead as a second-wave peacekeeping force.[161] However, as Manning stated, "Blair felt that he had given his word".[162] Having continuously pressed the president to pursue multilateral action through the UN, Blair would not refuse his support when Bush decided that diplomacy had failed and decided to invade.[163] Blair's declaration to Bush, "I'm there to the very end" had sealed Britain's fate (Woodword, 2004, p.338). This perhaps was the moment Blair lost his leverage, and therefore his ability to influence. With Parliament's approval, the UK joined a coalition of forty-nine states in support of the US-led invasion of Iraq. London's decision to join the US-led invasion of Iraq was an outward manifestation of the NRC, shared by Blair and others within No 10, that British interests were best served by staying close to Washington.

### 4.9 Conclusion: Evidence of British influence?

When Blair first became Prime Minister, he was advised by Jonathan Powell to "get right up the arse of the Americans" (Kettle, 2018, p.175). This need to 'stay close to the Americans' had dominated British foreign policy since Suez. It was not solely to maintain good relations but to "provide the opportunity to influence US policy from the inside, as Blair believed he had done in Afghanistan" (ibid.). Despite the UK government's best endeavours to influence US policy at the strategic and operational level, Blair was only partially successful.

The degree to which the UK successfully influenced US policy in Iraq has been a topic of considerable debate within the literature on AAR. As in Afghanistan, Blair

[161] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Interview with Sir David Manning, iPhone, 8 July 2022.

continued to nurture a strong and intimate relationship with Bush, both to maximise British influence on the global stage but also to preserve the UK's long-standing partnership with the US. The UK's readiness to 'show willing' towards Washington by confronting Saddam, led to London accumulating high levels of political capital and influence in the White House. However, as this chapter has shown, there were clear limitations to British influence. Applying the framework of smart power, this section concludes the following about British influence in Iraq: On the one hand, the Blair government achieved partial success in its exercise of smart power, for example, by managing to persuade the Bush administration to pursue two UNSC resolutions and to re-engage the US across a series of crises in the Middle East, which included a commitment to producing a roadmap for peace in Israel-Palestine and influencing Gaddafi to disarm Libya of its WMD in 2003. Despite these diplomatic victories, however, the UK was ultimately unable to leverage which resulted in Washington's pursuit of unilateralism in Iraq. In short, the UK was partially successful in its exercise of smart power in the build-up to intervention in Iraq, however, as this chapter has explored, the UK achieved limited influence over Washington's planning of the post-war agenda, specifically over the issue of nation-building. Ultimately, while the UK's voice mattered to the US, it did not determine the desired outcomes.

While many Anglo-American studies have focused on Blair's failures, this chapter suggests that the outcomes were more nuanced. Blair was, for example, able to persuade Bush to go down the route of securing UN resolution 1441 on November 8, 2002, and this should be remembered. As Manning wrote in a private memo one day following the Crawford summit:

> The PM also told me that Bush had been clear that he wanted to build a broad coalition for his Iraq policy. This had apparently persuaded him to dismiss those on

> the American Right who were arguing there was no need and no point in bothering with UN inspectors.[164]

While at Crawford in April 2002, both Sir David Manning and Alistair Campbell, Blair's Communications Adviser, observed the political dynamics between both parties where Bush frequently used Blair to convince Cheney that the path to war needed to go through the UN. These encounters illustrated the weight of Blair's influence on Bush's thinking. As Campbell recounted: "Here you had an American President using a British Prime Minister to persuade an American Vice-President to do something he didn't want the US government to do" (Blair & Brown New Labour Revolution, 2021).

The Blair government's insistence that the UK could not take part in military action in Iraq unless the US sought UN authorisation was not treated casually by the Bush administration. By September 7, Bush decided at a National Security Council meeting to pursue the UN route (Chilcot, 2017, p.17). Considering Bush's hawkish inner circle, this was no small victory for British diplomacy. As Manning recounted, Bush's commitment to multilateral diplomacy, under the framework of the UN, was evident in his speech to the UN General Assembly on September 12, 2002, when the President asked for a new resolution, especially because this specific point had been omitted from the text during his speech.[165] "He [Bush] remembered that it should be there, and he put it in himself…this was a pretty extraordinary moment…we had a moment of maximum Western cohesion".[166]

Despite the success of UNSC resolution 1441, America's commitment to multilateralism was nonetheless short-lived. As Bush stated during his speech to the UN

[164] Memo to Simon McDonald from Sir David Manning, 2 April 2002, 'Prime Minister's visit to the US April 5-7 2002', TNA.
[165] Interview with Sir David Manning, London, 4 March 2022.
[166] Ibid.

General Assembly, if Saddam defied the UN, "the US would not stand by and do nothing in the face of the threat" (Bush, 2002b). The purposefully ambiguous language of 1441 may have achieved consensus, but it also highlighted the different positions amongst the five permanent members of the Security Council, specifically the issue of whether military action was justified (Chilcot, 2016a, p.17). The decision to secure a second Security Council resolution and to give UN inspectors until the end of March or early April to execute their tasks[167] only increased impatience in Washington.[168] Bush's frustration with the UN was evident in his State of the Union address in January 2003, when during his "call upon the United Nations to fulfil its Charter", Bush declared: "…the course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others. Whatever action is required…I will defend the freedom and security of the American people" (Bush, 2003). In short, the US was going to act with or without UN authorisation. To this extent, Blair had underestimated the political forces at play.

Despite Blair's popularity within Washington, he could not fully persuade the Bush administration away from over-relying on "the most direct and visible source of American strength" (Nye, 2008, p.6) – military power. Blair's unconditional support of Bush did not convert into influence over US decision-making in Iraq, thus highlighting the limitations of the 'special' relationship itself. Thus, Iraq reveals another core truth about great power politics in international relations – there is no such thing as influence, only leverage. As Sir Richard Dalton commented: "You don't get your way with influence, you get your way with leverage. It's having something to bring to the table."[169] Blair's promise to Bush on July 28, 2002, "I will be with you, whatever", highlighted a pivotal moment in the special relationship in which the UK lost leverage. Blair's offer of unwavering support to Bush

[167] Letter to Condoleezza Rice from David Manning, 24 January 2003, 'untitled', TNA.
[168] Memo to Tony Blair from David Manning, 11 December 2002, 'Iraq', TNA.
[169] Interview with Sir Richard Dalton, Zoom, 17 May 2022.

diminished any leverage the UK had to influence US decision-making in Iraq. Blair's set of pre-conditions for British support – a legal basis for invasion, an international coalition; a quiescent Israel/Palestine; a positive risk/benefit assessment; and the preparation of domestic opinion[170] – were not measured against US power to secure British national interests.

As Sir Malcolm Rifkind,[171] a British politician who served in the cabinets of Margaret Thatcher and John Major from 1986 to 1999, argued, Blair could have followed in the footsteps of previous Prime Ministers, namely Harold Wilson, who, in 1967, refused to send British troops to Vietnam, causing a rift in the alliance.[172] Instead, the Bush administration's decision to confront Saddam militarily, in the absence of a UNSC resolution, highlighted the limitations of British smart power. Blair's belief in the special relationship as a mechanism through which the UK could maintain and project influence, informed and directed the UK's decision to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the US in Iraq. Despite London urging Washington to disarm Saddam through peaceful means, British smart power could not achieve desired outcomes. Instead, Blair resorted to military force.

Moreover, intervention in Iraq revealed the imbalance of power in the Anglo-American alliance. Washington's pursuit of unilateral military action, despite leading a global "coalition of the willing", illustrated an uncomfortable truth in AAR – US unilateralism often leaves little room for 'special' relationships. On the one hand, despite efforts to keep the US military timetable "on track", American military planners were highly conscious of British political considerations, reporting that "the only event which

[170] Note to Tony Blair from David Manning, 19 July 2002, 'Iraq: Conditions for Military Action', TNA.
[171] Rifkind served as Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) from 2010 until 2015. The ISC provides oversight of the UK's intelligence agencies, MI6, MI5 and GCHQ.
[172] Interview with Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Zoom, 19 July 2022.

might significantly affect the US timetable would be problems for the UK", describing it like "trying to play football without the quarterback" (Chilcot, 2016a, p.29). As such, the Bush administration made efforts to secure a second UN resolution as it understood its importance to the Blair government. This counters the argument that the alliance was regarded as more special to the British than the Americans, and reveals that the Anglo-American alliance in Iraq was a transactional relationship based on common self-interest and a shared sense of endeavour.

Equally, the US equated British solidarity in Iraq with political legitimacy. Britain's role in building a 'coalition of the willing', much of which was due to Blair's diplomatic fluency, helped cover US intervention. American military primacy meant that the US could have physically acted alone in Iraq, but British support gave the US political cover. As past interventions in the Middle East demonstrated, in particular, the 1990-91 Gulf War led by President George H. Bush, the US preferred support from NATO or a 'coalition of the willing', and although it has not needed a military contribution from other nations, support of allies helped the US politically, both at home and internationally. This time in Iraq was no different. As Lord Ricketts argued: "They [US] could have done without us militarily, but in terms of American public opinion…I think having Britain alongside as a supportive ally made a difference…because if Britain hadn't gone with America, the other Europeans wouldn't have either who more supportive…".[173] In sum, third party diplomatic traction was the UK's real value for the Bush administration in Iraq. Despite the joint strategic interests and shared sense of endeavour underpinning the Anglo-American alliance, US intervention in Iraq was driven largely by its own national self-

[173] Interview with Lord Peter Ricketts, Zoom, 23 June 2022.

interests. As Sir Richard Dalton bluntly put it: "America will do what America wants to do and the rest of us get bulldozed out of the way".[174]

However, the evidence does suggest that Bush, in particular, adopted a more considered and empathetic attitude towards Blair and the pressures he faced, both at home and internationally; most likely a result of the close relationship shared between both leaders. Bush's concern for Blair's vote in Parliament, for example, revealed the high level of importance that the US attributed to UK participation. As Marsh and Baylis (2006) argued, the US viewed the UK as an authoritative voice worth listening to, thus underscoring its 'special' status. This viewpoint is reinforced by the frequent exchanges between the White House and No 10 in the build-up to the Iraq War. For example, Colin Powell habitually rang British officials, including Jack Straw and Tony Blair, requesting they pressure Bush on particular issues, specifically over taking UN action.[175] According to one senior British official: "That sort of relationship didn't exist with any other country."[176] Throughout the planning phase of the war, the diplomatic relationship between Bush and Blair, in particular, remained strong. The almost daily phone calls were a testament to this. However, as journalist Michael White has argued: "The fact is…no British prime minister can afford to fall out with the President. The last one who did was Anthony Eden and look what happened to him" (Kettle, 2018, p.175). This suggests that, even if policy divergences existed, Blair may have felt he had little room to disagree with Bush. Ultimately, however, British smart power could not trump hard American interests in Iraq, thus highlighting the limitations of Britain's influence in Washington.

Critics have argued that the UK received little benefit in exchange for its unconditional support of the US-led war in Iraq. According to UK's MOD statistics, a total

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[174] Interview with Sir Richard Dalton, Zoom, 17 May 2022.
[175] Interview with Lord Jay of Ewelme, Zoom, 6 April 2022.
[176] Ibid.

of 179 British military personnel and MOD civilians died in Iraq between March 2003 to the end of April 2009 (Ministry of Defence, 2022). Although the US armed forces sustained far greater losses, with a total of 31,994 military and DOD civilian casualties between March 2003 and August 2010 (Department of Defence, 2022). Considering these statistics, Blair's belief in Britain's role to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with the US in Iraq, proved costly. On the one hand, Blair's goal of preserving the Anglo-American alliance was achieved, but at the cost of British blood and treasure and the erosion of credibility at home and amongst European allies. By May 2011, the UK had withdrawn all its remaining forces from Iraq, eight years after the invasion led by US forces, to whom it had preached its apparent expertise in COIN operations and Middle Eastern affairs. Ultimately, Iraq had become a lesson in failed imperial policing. A quote written on a board, discovered by Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster on a visit to a British Army base in Basra, best captured this reality: "We left without victory, but we left without disaster."[177]

[177] Interview with Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, Zoom, 2 June 2022.

# Chapter 5. Libya

*"The United States has no closer friend and ally than the United Kingdom."* (President Obama, Spring 2010)[178]

*"We don´t have a stronger friend and stronger ally than Nicolas Sarkozy, and the French people."* (President Obama, January 2011)[179]

## 5.1 Introduction

The unpopular Iraq War cast a long shadow over the special relationship. Following the premiership of Labour's Gordon Brown which saw the cooling of ties with the United States, Conservative Prime Minster David Cameron was intent on building a "realistic, sensible and practical relationship" with its Atlantic partner (Dumbrell, 2013, p.98). Upon entering Downing Street in May 2010, Cameron sought to re-brand Britain's foreign policy, by moving away from Blair's liberal interventionism and adopting an agenda based on liberal conservatism, which emphasised national interest over idealism. Cameron's more pragmatic foreign policy matched that of President Barack Obama's, who had also distanced himself from the neo-conservative policies of his predecessor, George W. Bush. Despite both leaders' shared worldview, the dramatic events of the so-called 'Arab Spring' in early 2011 tested Anglo-American relations.

This chapter explores the UK's alliance with the US during the 2011 NATO intervention of Libya following the wave of anti-government protests and armed rebellions that engulfed the region. The case of Libya illustrates a different typology of Anglo-American intervention, and therefore can be distinguished from the previous cases, Afghanistan and Iraq. Still, this thesis is testing the US-UK special relationship against the framework of smart power to explore whether the UK was successful in influencing US

[178] Dobson, A. and Marsh, S., 'Anglo-American Relations: End of a Special Relationship?', p. 675.
[179] Ibid.

policy in Libya. The UK-US-France intervention in Libya, which later became NATO's Operation United Protector, showed that the mistakes of Iraq were repeated: an over-reliance on hard power and a neglect of post-conflict reconstruction. In contrast to Obama's scepticism towards interventionism, Cameron's policy in Libya reflected the ubiquitous British prime ministerial worldview: the belief that an Arab dictator posed an imminent security threat to Britain's national interests (Moreland, 2022, p.1). Despite Cameron's endeavours to shed Blair's legacy of British adventurism in Afghanistan and Iraq, the 2011 Libya intervention demonstrated the UK's willingness to use hard power to protect British national interests.

### 5.2 Background to the Arab Uprisings

The advent of the Arab Spring in early 2011, or more accurately, the Arab Uprisings, brought a sea change in Western foreign policy in the MENA region. In the previous decade, after the unpopular war in Iraq, some argued that Western powers had lost their nerve over reform in the Arab world.[180] The Arab Uprisings afforded the US and UK the opportunity to influence change in the region and to be "a force for good",[181] although the Anglo-American intervention of Libya illustrated that the US and UK digested few of the lessons from Iraq when dealing with the aftermath of intervention. Moreover, the promise of reform, socioeconomic justice and political accountability became subsumed by the harsh realities that unfolded. Most Arab and North African states that had experienced the 'Arab Spring' lacked a legitimate opposition or effective civil society that could fill the vacuum of power (McMaster, 2020, p.275). Instead, competing militia groups and terrorist organisations emerged, creating a challenging context for the US, UK and Western allies who had hoped to promote good governance and democratic

[180] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.
[181] Ibid.

reform. To understand the chain of events that led to Anglo-American intervention in Libya, it is imperative to examine the background to the Arab Uprisings.

Eight years after the US launched OIF, the US withdrew the bulk of its armed forces from Iraq as the Obama administration sought to establish a “new beginning” with the Arab world and the MENA region more broadly (Obama, 2009). Similarly, the UK concluded its operations in Iraq, marking the end of Operation Telic, and withdrew its forces by May 22, 2011 (Hopkins, 2011). But in late 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian fruit vendor, set himself on fire to protest economic injustice and the government’s autocratic rule and corruption (McMaster, 2020, p.256), initiating a series of anti-government demonstrations and armed rebellions, beginning first in Tunisia in December 2010 and spreading across Arab states in the MENA region. Unexpectedly for both local Arabs and Western powers (Byman, 2013, pp.290-91), the demonstrations did not immediately attract Western attention until President Zayn al-Abidine Ben Ali, who had ruled Tunisia since 1987, was removed from power (ibid.). The anti-government protests in Tunisia created a domino-like effect across the Arab world, leading to mass demonstrations protesting oppressive regimes in the region: Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Syria’s President Bashar Assad, the Al Khalifa monarchy in Bahrain and Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi in Libya.

Initially, the US and the UK backed some regimes, such as Mubarak, who was seen as a stable ally. In a speech entitled ‘A New Beginning’ to Cairo University on June 4, 2009, President Barack Obama had advocated political reform in Egypt based on “shared common principles” such as “justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings” (Obama, 2009). This was seen as a call for reform, rather than a change of political order. Still, Obama’s call for change amidst the eruption of anti-government demonstrations was later seen to encourage protest against Mubarak while encouraging

opposition in other Arab states. As Gerges argued, Obama was caught in the middle of weighing "the risks of both continued support for increasingly unpopular and repressive regimes and a strong push by the United States to reform…" (2013, p.306). According to a five-page memo titled 'Political reform in the Middle East and North Africa', Obama urged his top advisers to challenge the notion that American interests were always served by stability in the region (ibid.). Mubarak's eventual removal from power on February 11, 2011, after 18 days of protest, rippled across North Africa, including Libya.

Demonstrations first began in Libya on February 15, 2011, when protestors began protesting against Gaddafi in Benghazi. From a US perspective, Gaddafi no longer posed a serious risk to American interests at home or abroad. In fact after 9/11, Gaddafi was regarded as a valued partner in the US 'war on terror' as Libya struggled with jihadist inspired terrorism (Byman, 2013, p.298; Boeke and van Zuijdewijn, 2016, p.19). The ebbing of the confrontation between Washington and Gaddafi's regime requires further explanation.

During the 1990s, US-Libyan relations were tense as Washington had demanded that Libya be held accountable for its involvement in the downing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1998 (Arms Control Association, 2021). This continued under the Bush administration, who, along with their British counterparts, presented a quid pro quo to the Libyan government: the US and UK would allow UN sanctions to be lifted provided the Libyans take full responsibility for Lockerbie, including "satisfying requirements on compensating the families of the Pan AM 103 victims."[182] The West's bargaining with Gaddafi did not end there, however. With unilateral sanctions still in place (Ronen, 2008, p.63), Washington and London pressed the Libyan government over its

[182] Letter to the Chairman from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 'Libya and Victims of Terrorism', 8 December 2008.

WMD programs. In 2002 and 2003, Washington had become increasingly concerned over the extent to which Libya had progressed its nuclear weapons program, including the development of long-range missile delivery systems (ibid.); this coincided with the US' and Britain's preparations to launch OIF to combat the threat of WMD in Iraq. Thus, another quid pro quo was offered to the Libya government, and in December 2003, Gaddafi agreed to disarm Libya of its nuclear weapons (Guiora, 2011, p.264). Considered a victory for both American and British diplomacy, the US-Libya relationship, once considered uneasy and strained, had significantly improved. However, Gaddafi's agreement to dismantle Libya's nuclear program came at a price. According to a 154-page report by Human Rights Watch (2012), Gaddafi's expectations for military and security cooperation agreements with the US allegedly led the US and the UK to collude with Gaddafi to hand over opponents and terror suspects to Tripoli for detention and torture.

### 5.21 Gaddafi's march on Benghazi

Within weeks of the initial protests, in March 2011, Gaddafi had lost control of major cities, including Misrata and Benghazi, which led to pro-Gaddafi forces launching a counter-offensive against rebel forces (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2016a, p.6). Gaddafi reportedly hired mercenaries from several African states, deployed the Libyan air-force to help crush the rebellion and threatened to slaughter Libyan protestors as part of his vow that he would "rather die in Libya as a martyr than surrender" (Terry, 2015, p.164). Human Rights Watch had reported that, by February 21, 233 people had been killed (ibid). Gaddafi's diatribe against Libyan civilians prompted an immediate response from the Arab League, the African Union and UN Human Rights Council who condemned his use of force. On February 26, the UNSC passed resolution 1970, demanding that Gaddafi stop the violence against Libyan civilians. They imposed an arms embargo and isolated Gaddafi and his inner circle via a travel ban and assets freeze. Days

later, on March 1, the Human Rights Council suspended Libya's membership. Gaddafi's Libya was increasingly becoming a pariah state as the international community condemned the regime's violence.

Although resolution 1970 was symbolic (Boeke and van Zuijdewijn, 2016, p.27), at this point, the UNSC had not authorised armed intervention to stop pro-Gaddafi forces. As Gaddafi's forces marched towards Benghazi, the epicentre of the anti-Gaddafi rebellion, Gaddafi's son, Saif, famously declared that "everything would be over in 48 hours" (Terry, 2015, pp.164-65). The Arab League asked the UNSC to impose a NFZ after reports emerged of Gaddafi forces using "military aircraft, mortars and heavy weaponry against civilians (Arab League, 2011). Against this backdrop, on March 17, the UNSC adopted resolution 1973 which authorised member states "to take all necessary measures" to protect civilians under threat of attack in Libya (UN Security Council, 2011b). The resolution was passed by ten votes to zero with five abstentions: Russia, China, Brazil, South Africa, and somewhat surprisingly, Germany (Terry, 2015, p.165). In accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter, resolution 1973 imposed a NFZ over Libya and reconfirmed the arms embargo that was previously established under resolution 1970 (UN Security Council, 2011b).

A multi-state coalition including Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Qatar, Spain, United Arab Emirates, UK and USA contributed military assets to enforce resolution 1973 (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2016a, p.6). On March 19, under the codename Operation Ellamy, the UK now contributed 2,000 military personnel, 6 Typhoons, 5 attack helicopters, refuelling tankers and specialist surveillance aircraft (HC Deb 14 November 2011, c.517) to enforce resolution 1973 to prevent attacks on civilians. This coincided with France's Operation Harmattan, which also deployed fighters and attack helicopters, and Canada's Operation Mobile, which first began on

February 25, 2011, as an evacuation mission but later became a joint combat mission with air and maritime aircraft based in Italy (Canada Department of National Defence, 2022). Meanwhile, on March 19, the US launched Operation Odyssey Dawn, where US forces targeted Gaddafi's air defences and coordinated missions between coalition members. In an unprecedented move, however, the US scaled back its military involvement in Libya after ten days of operations, transferring the leadership of operations to NATO. As a result of the Obama administration's reluctance to become involved in another conflict in the Arab world, intervention of Libya was not a strategic priority for the US.

On March 24, NATO agreed to take control of the NFZ, and on March 31, assumed command of all coalition military operations in Libya as part of NATO Operation Unified Protector (ibid.). Between March and October 2011, pro-Gaddafi forces fought rebel groups associated with the National Transitional Council (NTC), who received air support from NATO (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2016b, 318) and military training and equipment from states like Qatar. By mid-September, the UN recognised the NTC as Libya's official governing authority (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2016a, p.6), while failing to fully acknowledge the underlying tribal and religious forces at play on the ground. Once Gaddafi was captured and brutally killed on October 20, the NTC declared an end to operations on October 23. Upon the NTC's 'liberation' of Libya, NATO's Operation Unified Protector (OUP) ended on October 31 (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2015).

### 5.3 The UK's role in Libya

Unlike Afghanistan and Iraq, the UK sought to play a greater leadership role in Libya, alongside France and the US, and positioned itself "firmly on the front foot in contrast to other Western countries" during the Arab Uprisings (Cameron, 2019, p.270).

Despite Cameron's desire to distance himself from the controversy of the Bush-Blair wars in the Middle East, circumstances changed No 10's mind. The belief in the UK's role as the 'influential rule of law state' prompted Cameron's urge to "do the right thing" and to uphold Britain's duty to uphold the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) by intervening in Libya (Cameron, 2010, p.268). Despite talk of a more pragmatic British foreign policy, Cameron had become another 'Blairite' interventionist.

The UK assumed two roles in the 2011 Libya intervention: 1) diplomatic leadership, by urging the international community to pass Security Council resolutions 1970 and 1973, and 2) military partnership, by acting as a key NATO ally, alongside France and the US, in NATO's OUP. Alongside France, the UK led the diplomatic process in Libya. In February, as the international community rushed to condemn the violence in Libya and called for an end to hostilities, British, French and American diplomats "started to push hard for a resolution with teeth" (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014, p.898). The UK, in particular, "took the pen" and acted as the primary drafter of resolutions that authorised and guided intervention in Libya.[183] According to one British delegate, "from the outset, the British 'decided we'd throw everything in 1970…" (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014, p.898). In consultation with their French colleagues, the British drafted resolution 1970 and circulated it to the Americans and European non-permanent members of the Security Council (ibid.). The UK delegation was widely recognised for its skills in solving legal technicalities that often kept the Security Council in gridlock. For example, many of the sanctions provisions had been 'copied and pasted' from previous, British-authored resolutions (ibid). Thus, the UK's reputation for diplomatic competence converted into influence within the international community, and as conditions in Libya continued to deteriorate, the British, as well as the French, were able to control the diplomatic pace. As

[183] Interview with Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice, Zoom, 11 March 2022.

Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall observed about the UK's role: "The centre of gravity was the cohesion of the alliance…right from the operation to the grand strategic, the UK paid a special part in ensuring continued consensus with everybody."[184]

In addition to leading the diplomatic process, the UK also played a significant role in urging the UN to endorse military action in Libya (Chivvis, 2013, p.3). On March 13, the Arab League called for a NFZ over Libya which gave the UK the opportunity to lead the process of drafting a new resolution authorising military action (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014, p.900). Wary of a purely NFZ mandate,[185] Obama, who by now had an aversion to intervention in the MENA region, changed course to support resolution 1973, which authorised military action to protect Libyan civilians (Chivvis, 2013, p.3). Images in the media, intelligence reports of a looming massacre as well as internal and ally pressure were contributing factors that played a role in the President's change of heart.

Against this backdrop of support for 1973, British diplomats like Mariot Leslie, the UK ambassador to the UN, devised a criterion, aptly named the 'Leslie criteria', by which NATO could intervene militarily (Boeke and van Zuijdewijn, 2016, p.26). This included a demonstrable need for intervention, a clear legal basis and regional support (Lindström and Zetterlund, 2012, p.34). Contrary to French preferences, the UK, alongside the US, promoted a NATO lead role in Libya. Eventually the UK and France agreed to a joint action plan whereby the mission was transferred to NATO (Dumbrell, 2013, p.27) after US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, brokered a deal with the French to transfer civilian-protection mission to NATO (Chivvis, 2012, p.72). Initially, this was a setback for Sarkozy, who had hoped to diminish NATO's role, however US and British diplomacy won out by convincing France that "the international coalition would have political

[184] Interview with Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall, Zoom, 9 May 2022.
[185] Interview with Secretary Robert Gates, Zoom, 7 July 2022.

oversight but that NATO would have to assume military control" (Watt, Hopkins and Traynor, 2011).

The UK's role in Libya was to support NATO OUP as a key partner, although there are conflicting narratives about the exact nature of the UK's 'supporting' role. Some scholars have argued that the British, alongside the French, were "the driving force" behind intervention (Hachigian and Shorr, 2013; Boeke and van Zuijdewijn, 2016; Fiddes, 2020, p.152) while others contended that the British played a supporting role in the US-led campaign before NATO took over military operations (Chivvis, 2012). According to a 2016 Foreign Affairs Committee report, the US was described as playing a supporting role to the UK and France (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2016a, p.3). While US military and diplomatic power played "a major role behind the scenes", the American role was limited in scope, as just ten days after initial strikes began, the US pulled its strike aircraft from operations (Chivvis, 2012, p.74). As a result, the UK and France were responsible for executing the majority of strike missions (ibid.) with the UK flying 2,400 sorties (comprising one-fifth of all NATO strike missions) across Libya (Cameron, 2011a).

However, without US logistical support, OUP would not have been a guaranteed success. In addition to US intelligence, there were certain military capabilities, such as Air-To-Air Refuelling assets and Joint Personnel Recovery, that only the US possessed that were crucial to the mission.[186] According to Waterfall, who commanded British air operations under OUP: "Without a doubt, the US played a critical role in the conflict throughout. Their enablers were crucial. Moreover, their intelligence was pivotal to success…Without the enablers, the operation would not have been the success it was in the time it took."[187] Nonetheless, what this intervention did demonstrate was that the UK

[186] Interview with Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall, Zoom, 9 May 2022.
[187] Ibid.

sought a greater leadership role in comparison to previous conflicts, notably Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, as one senior US military officer observed, the British were content with the US having a major role in operations, as long as operations were not solely led by the French.[188] Although the Lancaster House Treaties in November 2010 were designed to cement Anglo-French defence and security cooperation, the intervention of Libya was the first event in which both powers were "looking to be at least as good as each other."[189] It was subsequently described more as a "sibling rivalry"[190] than an equitable partnership.

### 5.4 Complementarity in Libya

The UK pursued a smart power strategy in Libya that combined a variety of hard and soft power tools, including military force, economic sanctions, multilateral diplomacy, international cooperation and moral leadership. There were two soft power tools that the UK utilised to help persuade Washington to intervene in Libya: achieving Arab League endorsement and passing a UN resolution. The UK "reached a breakthrough in the Arab world" when UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, successfully convinced the Arab League to endorse action (Cameron, 2019, p.278). According to Cameron, Hague persuaded the Egyptian secretary-general to encourage action, which guaranteed support from Lebanon, the only Arab country on the UNSC (ibid.). Moreover, calls for action beyond a limited NFZ gave the UK an opportunity to achieve a resolution to protect Libyan civilians.

Securing regional support from the Arab League, in particular the UAE, Qatar, Lebanon and Jordan, was a diplomatic victory for the UK as it meant that the resolution did not attract a China-Russia veto, something that would have proved difficult for Beijing

[188] Interview with Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice, Zoom, 11 March 2022; Interview with Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall, Zoom, 9 May 2022.
[189] Interview with Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall, Zoom, 9 May 2022
[190] Interview with Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice, Zoom, 11 March 2022

and Moscow, as this would have meant rejecting the official stance of the region that wanted to remove Gaddafi. Moreover, passing resolution 1973 also symbolised Arab support of Western intervention in the MENA region and that Libya was not just another liberal crusade for democracy in the Arab world. This was an important development for the US as the Obama administration stipulated that it wanted to secure regional support to demonstrate that Libya was not a repeat of Iraq (Byman, 2013, p.313). In sum, the partnership formed between NATO and Arab states to protect Libyan civilians on the ground was a direct result of British influence.

Alongside France, the UK was also instrumental in leading the diplomatic process to draft and to pass a UN resolution that included "all necessary measures to protect civilian life" in Libya (UN Security Council, 2011b). In addition to securing regional endorsement from the Arab League, achieving a clear legal mandate from the international community was an essential condition for British intervention in Libya. The "Leslie criteria", named after UK Ambassador to NATO Dame Mariot Leslie (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014, p.905), set out the three conditions that justified NATO military intervention in Libya: "a demonstrable need", "regional support" and "a clear, legal basis" (Cameron, 2011b). This revealed another expression of smart power as London's emphasis on achieving regional support and a UNSC resolution stemmed from Cameron's NRC of the UK as the 'influential rule of law state'.

Having initially called for a NFZ, which some in Washington, specifically Obama and Gates, actively opposed believing it would be ineffective against Gaddafi's ground forces (Gates, 2020, p.299), the UK worked alongside France to pass UN resolution 1973 which demonstrated "a meaningful consensus within the international system" (Fiddes, 2020, p.146) to authorise NATO military action to protect Libyan civilians against

Gaddafi's forces. In his memoirs, Cameron described the UK government's efforts to garner support from other countries in the Security Council: "William was hitting the phones. Mark Lyall Grant, our ambassador to the UN, was flat out. I was speaking to my opposite numbers across the world" (Cameron, 2019, p.279). While Obama may have been reluctant to use military force in Libya, Cameron did not have to convince Washington of the necessity for a legal mandate to deploy force. Still, Obama had to be convinced. For Cameron, this was a top priority.

Cameron's suspicions about American disinterest were not baseless. Keen to show that the US had learned its lessons from Iraq, the Obama administration believed that military intervention required multilateral support and legitimacy, arguing that "multilateralism regulates hubris" and "checks American self-righteousness" (Goldberg, 2016, p.262). Washington sought to demonstrate a new model of leadership whereby the US would not, by default, always lead (Byman, 2013, p.290), but would encourage its allies to do so instead. As Ivo Daalder, who served as US Ambassador to NATO from 2009 to 2013, argued:

> Obama had a different model of leadership…leadership isn't defined by who's in the driving seat, but by how many people you get with you…it isn't about the US going out here and telling everybody what to do…it's to use the collective capabilities of everyone to have a bigger impact.[191]

The administration's foreign policy goal of encouraging European and Arab allies "to pull their weight more" (Byman, 2013, p.313) in Libya did not stem solely from the belief that multilateral interventions were deemed more legitimate, but also from the reality that the US was "practically overstretched and debt-ridden" (ibid.). Interviews with senior NATO officers have suggested a similar dynamic occurred between London and Washington in the lead up to intervention. "The US didn't drive the train…because the US

[191] Interview with Ivo Daalder, Zoom, 9 December 2022.

didn't want to. Who drove the train? Who grabbed the pen? It was the Brits…they took the lead because the US wasn't willing to…".[192] Although initially frustrating for Cameron, Obama's reticence ultimately provided the UK with the opportunity to play a greater role in the operation. The UK still relied on American military power, however, specifically airpower, logistics and intelligence, to execute a successful campaign.

The Anglo-American intervention in Libya revealed another conclusion about the nature of British smart power. Although the UK used a combination of hard and soft power tools, the intervention underscored the vital role of hard power, albeit limited, in executing a successful operation. The soft power tools deployed successfully included the UK and France passing resolution 1970 imposing an arms embargo, sanctions and assets freeze against the Gaddafi regime, the Arab League suspending Libya's membership following his diatribe against anti-Gaddafi 'rebels' and the UNSC pressuring Gaddafi to "meet its responsibilities to protect its population" (UN Security Council, 2011a). At the same time, the US and UK, as part of NATO OUP, resorted to military force to achieve their primary objective in Libya. Moreover, Libya demonstrated that, despite the US playing a less prominent role, American military power remained critical to success on the ground. Cameron recounted one planning meeting, in particular, between US, UK and French officials where one US senior officer "proceeded to reel off the awesome extent of US military power that would be brought to bear...followed by a list of all the things the Americans were going to do" (2019, p.280). As Cameron highlighted, "It was clear who still wielded the real power" (2019, p.280).

Furthermore, while resolution 1973 authorised the Alliance to use "all necessary measures" to protect Libyans from Gaddafi's forces, but it did not allow for the

[192] Interview with Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice, Zoom, 28 July 2022.

deployment of ground troops. Both the US and UK suffered from the ‘Iraq syndrome’; there were to be no boots on the ground (Ricketts, 2021, p.70) although the UK did covertly deploy special forces to support, train and advise Libyan rebels. As Cameron reflected in his memoirs: “One thing on which we were all agreed however was the situation didn’t warrant ‘boots on the ground’ – a level of intervention that would never get past parliament” (Cameron, 2019, p.276). Similarly, Obama made it clear that “a ground force deployment was never on the cards” (Rickets, 2021, p.70). As such, instead of deploying ground troops, Anglo-American operations emphasised working with allies, which resulted in a low-risk, low-cost and limited operation in both scope and duration. Despite its limited nature, the intervention was regarded as highly successful in terms of achieving its core objective. However, the state of Libya post-Gaddafi has led some to label the intervention as a ‘failure’ (Kuperman, 2013; Terry, 2015). While this thesis does not seek to judge whether the Libyan intervention was successful or not, it does argue that NATO’s use of overwhelming air power, and lack of diplomatic and political planning in the aftermath, demonstrated the limitations of not having a balanced approach across all instruments of power. In the case of Libya, the non-military instruments of power were weakly applied “as well as the will and imagination to use them” (Gates, 2020, p.302), leaving the country in a state of civil war and instability.

In sum, the US and UK ensured to tick every box in Libya – achieving a UN mandate, building international consensus, securing regional support – to demonstrate that the intervention did not become another Iraq. Unlike the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Libya showed what intervention, given the right conditions and limited objectives, could accomplish; however, the West failed to plan for a post-Gaddafi Libya. The ghosts of Iraq had indeed returned.

### 5.5 The role of context

When assessing the impact of British influence on US decision-making in Libya, it is important to consider the realities on the ground for both the US and UK at the time of intervention. While Cameron was ultimately successful in persuading a reluctant Obama administration to intervene in Libya, albeit in a limited manner, there were other factors outside of Britain's control that also influenced US policy preferences. Pressures at home and abroad competed for America's attention. Convincing the public that Libya was not Iraq 2.0 proved challenging. After all, Obama had been elected on a pledge to disentangle the US from overseas commitments and to rebuild relationships with the Arab world. These considerations, combined with the fallout from the 2008 financial crisis and the threat of rising Chinese power, resulted in the US committing to decisive but limited intervention in Libya.

Some within the White House, like Robert Gates, had proposed that the US "limit both the scale and duration given that the US was already fighting two wars that were consuming all available military resources" (Gates, 2020 p.299). Others, like Ambassador John Bolton, reflected that the US ultimately wanted to minimise its risks in Libya without compromising US status. As Bolton stated: "I think he [Obama] thought if he minimised involvement, he could get out more easily if it got more complicated…it was typical Obama, that he could take credit for it but minimise the risk…".[193] Nonetheless, Gaddafi's call to "cleanse Libya house by house…alley to alley" and to expel the "rats and cockroaches" warned of a looming massacre (Boeke and van Zuijdewijn, 2016, p.24) and any initial reluctance to intervene was quickly turned on its head. Despite Obama's scepticism about intervention, the practical application of Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

[193] Interview with Ambassador John Bolton, Zoom, 24 June 2022.

became a priority for London and Washington who both shared the same humanitarian instinct to act.[194]

### 5.51 Responsibility to Protect

The UK and the US both cited R2P, an international norm which states that the international community has a duty to protect individuals from mass atrocity crimes, to justify using military force in Libya. R2P was first adopted by the UN World Summit in 2005 after the international community failed to adequately respond to genocide in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. These events prompted new thinking about the nature of sovereignty and the state's responsibility to protect its citizens. Under the leadership of the Canadian government, the ICISS created R2P as "an attempt to reconfigure the relationship between sovereignty and human rights" (Bellamy, 2010, p.375). R2P involves three responsibilities: the responsibility to prevent, to react and to rebuild (Mutimer, 2010, p.88). The basic principles of R2P, first codified in 2001 by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), are twofold: 1) "state sovereignty implies responsibility therefore the state is responsible for protecting its people" and 2) if a population is suffering serious harm as a result of internal war, repression or state failure and that state is "unwilling or unable to halt or avert it", then the international community has a responsibility to intervene (ibid.).

One of the earliest thinkers around R2P, Francis Deng argued that "sovereignty carries…certain responsibilities for which governments must be held accountable" and that states are not just accountable to their own populations but also to the international community (Deng et al., 1996, p.1). As Bellamy argued, "conceptualising sovereignty as responsibility removed the validity of objections to international assistance and mediation

[194] Interview with Alistair Burt, Lancaster, 29 June 2022.

based on the principle of non-interference" (2010, p.369). According to the 2001 report published by the ICISS, R2P was formed on the assertion that the principle of non-interference yields to the R2P when states are unwilling or unable to protect their own citizens (ICISS, 2001, p.xi). But as the ICISS argued, R2P was about much more than military intervention. In that same report, the Commission advocated non-violent measures to address humanitarian emergencies, such as diplomacy, sanctions and legal measures (ibid.).

Opponents of R2P question who can legitimately authorise intervention and whether military force is an effective tool for humanitarian purposes (Bellamy, 2010, p.365). While there is broad consensus that some circumstances might justify the use of military action, critics argue that it should be used as a last resort (ibid., p.368). As Thomas Franck and Nigel Rodley put it, "very little good has been wrought" in the name of humanitarian intervention (1973, p.278). Some like former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, have argued that intervention should be understood in terms of utilising all measures short of armed force to prevent and stop humanitarian crises (ibid., p.369). Moreover, Simon Chesterman opined that humanitarian intervention could open the door for potential abuse and enable more powerful states to justify intervention based on their own national self-interest (2001, p.231). Realists oppose R2P simply on the basis that it does not work in practice. Instead, they argue that it tends to prolong conflict and create unstable post-war conditions (Bellamy, 2010, p.367). Critics of humanitarian intervention, like Edward Luttwak (1999), argue that intervention "reduces the proportion of wars that end in outright victory, and leave behind an unstable peace that is likely to reignite it".

As such, the debates surrounding the concept of R2P can be summarised by two questions: who has the right to authorise intervention and under what circumstances. The issue of sovereignty, as Deng and Annan argued, is understood as the responsibility to

protect, which obliges the international community to support states to adhere to their responsibilities of protecting their own populations. Thus, the international community has the responsibility to intervene in instances where states fail to protect their populations from crimes against humanity and mass genocide, as well as to rebuild societies afterwards. The challenge has been how to best implement R2P in practice, and to improve how the international community has responded to these crises.

Libya was "a test case for R2P" and the first military intervention with the goal of protecting civilians against its own government (Fiddes, 2020, p.148). As questions of, "Is it in the British national interest" echoed in Parliament in the days leading up to intervention; the Cameron government juggled tensions of human rights concerns with British business and national security interests (Davidson, 2013, p.321). For example, British intervention would have jeopardised the flow of oil to Europe, as both BP and Shell had contracts with Libya under Gaddafi. According to Byman, NATO's decision to intervene took 1.6 million barrels a day off the oil market, which increased prices from around $90 in the final week of 2010 to around $113 in April 2011 (2013, p.294). Ultimately, however, idealism trumped Cameron's realist considerations as the UK and France pressed for military action in Libya to protect Benghazi from attacks by Gaddafi's forces.

The British now feared they would have "another Srebrenica" on their hands if they failed to act (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2016a). The massacre of Srebrenica in July 1995, where more than 8,000 Muslims were murdered by the Bosnian Serb Army (ibid.), was in the back of British politicians' minds who had vowed 'never again'.[195] As John Casson reflected, the Balkan Wars were a formative foreign policy

[195] Ibid.

experience for politicians like Cameron, who “saw Libya…as another Bosnia.”[196] For Cameron, intervention in Libya was a “genuine humanitarian impulse.”[197] As Srebrenica and Rwanda illustrated the risks of non-intervention, the fear of committing another Iraq-style disaster in Libya was quickly drowned out by the fear of doing nothing.

Against this backdrop, Cameron asked his defence officials to plan potential military options for intervening in Libya (Boeke and van Zuijdewijn, 2016, pp.26-27). Furthermore, he involved the attorney general in all National Security Council (NSC)[198] meetings and asked Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell to draw up post-conflict stabilisations plans (ibid.). Despite Cameron’s endeavours to remake the UK’s image post-Iraq, by shaping a foreign policy that prioritised national interest over idealism, R2P played a pivotal role in the Cameron government’s decision-making to justify intervention in Libya (Byman, 2013, p.306). Again, London’s calls for intervention on the basis of humanitarian considerations revealed an exercise of smart power as Cameron saw it as part of the UK’s moral obligation to act in the face of a looming humanitarian massacre; this aligns with the role conception, the ‘opportunist-interventionist’ power identified by Gaskarth (2014, p.561, 577).

Similarly, Obama found himself walking a fine line between realist and idealist considerations. His national security team was divided on the issue of intervention in Libya (Gates, 2020, pp.298-299), with Vice President Joe Biden and US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates opposing military action. Gates famously challenged Obama: “Can I finish these two wars I’m already in before you start a third one?”[199] before losing the vote

[196] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.
[197] Interview with Sir Richard Dalton, Zoom, 17 May 2022.
[198] The National Security Council was established by Prime Minister David Cameron in May 2010 to coordinate foreign and security policy across Whitehall, and to ensure that the PM would receive balanced advice to support decision-making. Modelled after the US NSC, the cabinet committee still exists today.
[199] Interview with Secretary Robert Gates, Zoom, 7 July 2022.

in what was called "a 51- 49 decision."[200] On the other side of the aisle stood US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, along with advisers Samantha Power, Ben Rhodes and Antony Blinken who campaigned to protect Benghazi. As Gaddafi pledged to "purify Libya inch by inch", the pressure for the US to respond militarily had increased (Watts and Biegon, 2021, p.519). The "female hawks", Rice and Power, ultimately got their way. Their comparison of the unfolding situation in Libya to the 1994 Rwanda genocide helped to persuade Obama to "do what's right" in Libya (Rees, 2022, p.9). Combined with pressure from within, Cameron had also levelled with Obama: "Benghazi must not fall, or game over" (Cameron, 2019, p.277). Thus, despite Obama's belief in a more restrained American approach, in March 2011, the US became intertwined in another conflict in the MENA region.

Although both the UK and US aligned over wanting to prevent a genocide in Libya, Cameron and Obama diverged in their views about Gaddafi being a national security threat. As mentioned, from Washington's perspective, Gaddafi was not a risk to US interests. Since the Lockerbie bombing of 1988, Gaddafi's withdrawal from confrontation with the US led to the conclusion by some in Washington that Libya was 'wary but distinct', and therefore, posed no direct threat to US interests (ibid., p.265). With the exception of Ben Ali in Tunisia, every regime that fell during the Arab Uprisings was an important US counter-terrorism partner (ibid., p.297). From this perspective, the Arab Uprisings undermined stability in the region and had obscured the channels between US intelligence and Arab governments fighting al-Qaeda and other extremist groups, which did not serve US interests. However, in the case of Libya, humanitarian impulses outweighed geopolitical concerns.

[200] Ibid.

By contrast, Cameron harboured “a longstanding grudge”[201] and an “animus against Gaddafi that reflected a long Conservative Party history with the Libya issue,”[202] once labelling him a threat to British national security (Dawson, 2022, p.14). Some scholars have argued that Britain’s intervention in 2011 was to revenge Gaddafi for past wrongs, including rectifying the controversial release of al-Megrahi (Ababsa, 2015, p.17; Dawson, 2022). Moreover, the Cameron government “remained angry at Gaddafi for what he had done to Britain” (Dawson, 2022, p.369), namely over the supply of arms to the IRA by the Gaddafi regime and the murder of PC Yvonne Fletcher by a minister in Gaddafi’s government outside the Libyan embassy in London in 1984 (Oakes, 2011). While it is difficult to be certain whether Cameron viewed the Arab Uprisings as an opportunity to settle accounts with Gaddafi, the objective of NATO operations in Libya seemed to have evolved beyond its R2P mandate: “the West had signed Gaddafi’s death warrant” (Dawson, 2022, p.370).

### 5.52 Riding history’s wave

British intervention in Libya was also driven by other interests, in particular, to promote reform in Libya and to project British influence in the MENA region more broadly. By contrast, President Obama, who campaigned as a “sceptic of humanitarian intervention”, was more cynical about spreading democracy in Libya, although he had previously pushed for reforms during his 2009 Middle East tour (Byman, 2013, p.306). Similarly, Cameron was critical of Blair’s doctrine of liberal interventionism and warned against deploying military force abroad (Dumbrell, 2013, p.330). “You cannot drop democracy on a country from 30,000 feet!” was a commonly used phrase by Cameron who

[201] Interview with Sir Richard Dalton, Zoom, 17 May 2022.
[202] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.

had sought to distance himself from New Labour's interventionist policies (Fiddes, 2020, p.137).

Nevertheless, the Cameron government perceived the Arab Uprisings as an opportunity for the UK to be "on the right side of history"[203] by helping champion reform in Libya and to act as "a force for good"[204] in the region. Some in Washington, such as US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, shared London's stance over Libya. Despite the US' ambition to play a supporting role in Libya, Washington reaffirmed its commitment to democracy and human rights: "There is a right side to history and we want to be on it", stated Clinton (Byman, 2013, p.314). As Cameron told the House of Commons in the days leading up to intervention, the UK "must seize this chance to fashion a better future for this region…" (Cameron, 2011c). After counter-terrorism, the UK's next greatest priority in the Middle East was the promotion of regional security, in particular, "the management or counteraction of regional instability" (Kettle, 2022, p.87). The Cameron government faced a conundrum of either choosing to engage with existing regimes to preserve the status quo and to maintain influence in the region or to pursue reform to ensure prosperity at the risk of endangering Britain's long-term interests. Cameron himself believed, however, that the UK often "made a false choice between so-called stability on the one hand and reform and openness on the another" (Cameron, 2011c). For London, reform was the means to ensure "lasting stability" in the MENA region (ibid.).

In the spring of 2010, the FCO and the Department for International Development (DfiD) produced reports arguing that it was in "Britain's interest to support political, economic and social reform" (El-Badawy, 2022, p.185), and advised that autocratic regimes in the region that the UK had traditionally supported were "sleepwalking into

[203] Interview with General Sir Simon Mayall, London, 21 July 2022.
[204] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.

daunting times" (ibid.). One FCO paper, in particular, concluded that British interests were best served by a "stable, well-governed and prosperous" Middle East, and referred to the government's Arab Human Development agenda as being a key element in facilitating action on political and social participation.[205] This thesis does not explore how these recommendations were actioned in places like Libya, but it does suggest that the UK had placed a great deal of importance on the need for political and social reform in the region to safeguard British interests, even before the Arab Uprisings first began.

Status was also a main motivating factor in London's decision-making over Libya, Grant Dawson noted (2022, p.357) that Cameron, who was wary of the UK slipping into "second-class status", saw the Arab Uprisings as a moment to preserve Britain's status as a "major player in the world" (ibid., p.365) and to be seen as a global leader in promoting human rights and democratic values. Again, drawing on Gaskarth's (2014) work on NRCs, Cameron's view of Britain upholding its humanitarian responsibilities informed London's decision to use force to protect civilians in Libya. Moreover, Cameron believed that Britain's status was partly determined by its capacity and will to fulfil (and to be seen to fulfil) the responsibilities attached to its role as a Global Middle Power preventing a humanitarian catastrophe. This also included guiding the Libyan revolution to a successful conclusion post-Gaddafi (ibid., p.367). As Cameron described it, the Arab Uprisings were a "once in a generation opportunity, a moment when history turns a page. That next page is not yet written" (Cameron, 2011c). Through a combination of moral leadership, multilateral diplomacy projected through the UN and NATO, and deploying military force as part of NATO, the UK was determined to write that next page.

[205] Foreign Affairs Select Committee, 8 December 2011, 'British Foreign Policy and the "Arab Spring": The Transition to Democracy'.

### 5.6 Utilising the 'special relationship'

Cameron's perceptions of the special relationship informed much of his decision-making in Libya. Although he viewed the alliance as operating by the realities of R2P and less by a hard power agenda, Cameron's conception of Britain's role within the alliance influenced his decision to remain close to Washington in the build-up to intervention. Even if the UK took the lead in Libya, Cameron did not lose sight of the reality that Britain would ultimately benefit from US support. However, American reluctance to engage would put pressure on the UK, and other European allies, to do the heavy lifting in Libya. This internal dynamic within the US-UK relationship will now be examined in the following section.

#### 5.61 "Leading from behind"

Obama and Cameron held different perspectives about the role of the West in humanitarian intervention. This is best summarised by Cameron's account in his memoir: "He [Obama] had said…that 'the best revolutions are completed organic'. I was about to see whether he applied this pledge to Libya...I had the distinct feeling that the world's great superpower was dithering while Benghazi was about to burn" (2019, p.277). A major aspect of the Obama administration's foreign policy emphasised "multilateral retrenchment" which advocated minimising US overseas commitments and shifting burdens onto allies (Hallams and Schreer, 2012, p.318). Thus, US reticence to lead in Libya stemmed from the belief that other nations should "step up and help shoulder the burden of fostering a stable and peaceful world order" (Hachigian and Schorr, 2013, p.73). Obama's so-called "anti-free riders" policy (Goldberg, 2016, p.262) in Libya emerged from a frustration that historically nations had continuously pressured the US to act but showed "an unwillingness to put any skin in the game" (ibid., p.269). As the President told

the American people days before NATO assumed command of operations on March 31, "the burden of action should not be America's alone" (Fiddes, 2020, p.151).

Thus, the Obama administration's decision to "lead from behind" in Libya illustrated a new phase in the Anglo-American military relationship. As opposed to "the Bush model of leading alone" (Gerges, 2013, p.308) where the US previously led a 'coalition of the willing' into Iraq in 2003, Washington pushed for the UK, France and other nations to contribute more towards intervention in Libya, which Obama viewed as a more "European problem".[206] As such, once Operation Odyssey Dawn, the first phase of operations, had finished on March 31, the US moved to a supporting role, pressuring the UK and other European allies "to pull their weight more" (Byman, 2013, p.313). This caused shock and frustration in London and Paris who saw Washington's decision to "take a back seat" as an indication that the US was "eschewing its indispensable role of leadership" (ibid., pp.322-23). However, by providing the bulk of strike missions in Libya, alongside France, the UK moved away from solely depending on US hard power (Hachigian and Schorr, 2013, p.80) and ended up sharing credit with France for leading an international coalition widely credited with preventing a massacre.

Contrary to what 'leading from behind' suggests, Obama's model of burden-sharing was not, as Jeffrey Goldberg argued, an indication that the United States was less committed to regional stability and security in the MENA region, but rather an invitation for other nations to take action themselves without needing permission from the US (2016, p.261). That was why the assertion that the US was 'leading from behind', a throwaway comment made by an anonymous White House official, frustrated Obama. As the President commented in an interview with Goldberg, "We [US] don't have to always be

[206] Interview with Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice, Zoom, 11 March 2022; Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.

the ones up front. Sometimes we're going to get what we want precisely because we are sharing in the agenda" (ibid). Interviews with senior officers from both the US and UK armed forces have revealed that, one of the reasons the Obama administration transferred leadership of operations to NATO was due to the simple fact that the US did not want to lead in Libya. As Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice, who served as Air Component Commander for Operation Unified Protector, stated: "The US was not pulling the puppet strings. President Obama made the decision that indeed, the US was going to provide unique enablers, but there was no leading from behind."[207] "If there was one nation who was 'leading from behind'", argued another senior US officer, "it was France and…the UK."[208]

In short, the US approach in Libya reflected a new paradigm for transatlantic intervention where the US sought to play a less prominent role and where the burden of the operation was shared more equally between NATO members. Although the US continued to play a critical role militarily by providing critical enablers and command and control, the UK, alongside other European allies, flew the majority of NATO strike missions. While initially frustrated by US reluctance, the UK was willing and able to lead in Libya militarily, by providing the bulk of combat sorties (Hallams and Schreer, 2012, p.321) and diplomatically, by achieving consensus within the Security Council to pass resolution 1973, which authorised military action. As one senior British military officer concluded, Libya illustrated that "the UK was prepared to do the heavy lifting…and it did."[209]

### 5.62 NATO as a legitimate tool of intervention

[207] Interview with Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice, Zoom, 28 July 2022.
[208] Interview with retired senior US military officer, Zoom, 2022, name anonymised to protect individual's identity.
[209] Interview with Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall, Zoom, 9 May 2022.

Moreover, London sought to leverage its relationship Washington, by using NATO, a regional security institution, to legitimate the exercise of military action to prevent a genocide by Gaddafi's forces. For Washington, NATO was the preferred alternative as collectively, it not only had the operational capabilities to execute this type of intervention, but it provided the US with political cover to take decisive action and to exercise military force. Resolution 1973 extended the terms of the original mandate beyond the imposition of a NFZ to include the authorisation to use "all necessary measures". In practice, this led to a policy of a "no drive zone" where NATO forces attacked the entire Libyan Government command and communications networks (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2016a). As such, Western forces have been accused of allowing its policy of protecting civilians to drift into regime change; a claim NATO rejected. "Nobody ever whispered in my ear, 'We got to take him [Gaddafi] out'…", reflected Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice.[210] "The end-state given by the NAC [North Atlantic Council]…was to protect civilians under the United Nations Security Council resolution, and it said this will continue until the international efforts are no longer required."[211] Meanwhile, the debate had evolved rapidly; people had begun to "equate protecting civilians with changing the regime". However, those like US Ambassador Daalder have maintained that, operationally, the two goals were always separate.

As NATO was establishing its criteria for intervention, Cameron, Sarkozy and Obama authored a joint op-ed in *The Times* on April 14, 2011, in which they called for regime change in Libya in the name of R2P. A former Downing Street official suggested that the engagement with the press was the work of No 10 and the Elysee "offered to the Americans".[212] This claim, however, has not been confirmed by other sources. Critics have

[210] Interview with Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice, Zoom, 11 March 2022.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Interview with former Downing Street official, Email, June 2023, name anonymised to protect individual's identity.

argued that R2P was instrumentalised by NATO member states to justify intervention under the guise of moral humanitarianism and to facilitate regime change (Brockmeier et al, 2013; Dawson, 2022). Some have pointed to developments in Libya post-Gaddafi as having further discredited the principle of R2P (Terry, 2015). Steven Erlanger from the *New York Times* opined that R2P is a dubious concept due to its uneven application to crises and conflicts around the world (Erlanger, 2011). This thesis does not seek to examine the legality of Anglo-American intervention in Libya, or whether the concept of R2P was misapplied in the case of Libya; however, it explores how the Anglo-American alliance used R2P as a normative framework under which it launched humanitarian intervention.

One final point to consider regarding OUP was that, despite London and Washington remaining united about R2P, the US, UK, and other NATO member states, all had diverging objectives in Libya. While resolution 1973 authorised NATO to launch military action in Libya to protect civilians against Gaddafi's forces, it did not sanction regime change, and it did not allow for any kind of foreign occupation force on the ground. As Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice stated: "For the Alliance, it was never about regime change…because the Alliance would have never come to consensus about regime change."[213] Moreover, meeting notes from the Berlin ministerial meeting of NATO leaders on April 14, 2011, revealed that the Alliance had planned to work with the regime once the fighting had stopped. "One of the first objectives stated, 'The regime must permit unhindered humanitarian access…so the ministers representing the Alliance were even saying, 'When this is over, we're going to have to deal with some part of the regime.'"[214]

[213] Interview with Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice, Zoom, 11 March 2022.
[214] Ibid.

Nonetheless, regardless of NATO's end-state, individual countries within the alliance, notably the UK and France, had their own agendas which included removing Gaddafi from power. As Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall stated: "The NATO operation was about upholding R2P under UNSCR 1973. Without a doubt, contributing nations will have had their own agendas and national intent… The politicians were well aware of NATO end state – national perspective and drivers may have been different...".[215] According to Daalder, the UK and France endorsed regime change, believing that nothing would change on the ground unless Gaddafi was removed from power; however, the US had a different perspective and feared that intervention would lead to mission creep.[216] While NATO's mission in Libya may have differed from London and Washington's agenda in Libya, there was a lack of understanding about the core objectives of the campaign as intervention, initially launched to protect Libyan civilians from the Gaddafi regime, morphed into an exercise in regime change.

### 5.7 The politics of personal relations

The "backwash of the Bush-Blair years in the GWOT and 2003 Iraq War" (Dumbrell, 2012) affected US-UK relations during the Obama-Cameron era, which led to the emergence of a new dynamic within the relationship. The norm, 'come what may', which had framed the UK's unconditional political and military support for US interventions, particularly in Iraq, was replaced by a new dynamic during the Obama-Cameron years. Although the special relationship remained an important foundation of British security and defence policy, the Cameron government was eager to redefine the relationship with the US as "solid not slavish" (Dumbrell, 2013, p.99). This was a departure from images of Britain and American standing 'shoulder to shoulder' as

[215] Interview with Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall, Zoom, 9 May 2022.
[216] Interview with Ivo Daalder, Zoom, 9 December 2022.

comrades in arms. Moreover, it was also about placing clear blue water between Iraq and intervention in Libya, and framing Libya as a humanitarian operation. With the advent of the Arab Uprisings in early 2011, the Anglo-American alliance, which had positioned the UK as secondary to American power, was flipped on its head and undoubtedly put US-UK relations to the test.

**5.71 Solid not slavish**

As noted, the Cameron government was eager to realign its 'special' relationship with the US, which prompted the UK to adopt a new posture, described as "solid not slavish", towards its Atlantic ally (Dumbrell, 2013, p.99). As one British senior military officer put it: "Cameron no longer wanted the UK to be America's lapdog."[217] London still sought to align closely with Washington, as stated in the 2010 Tory manifesto, which put US-UK relations "at the heart of the UK's strategic relations" (Gannon, 2014, p.217). However, Cameron argued that a key component of the special relationship was Britain's ability to speak truth to American power. Amidst this re-positioning, UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, reassured colleagues in Washington that it would be "business as usual for the UK" as Anglo-American relations would continue to remain "the cornerstone of strategic thinking in London" (Hague, 2006). Instead of a relationship built on sentimental attachment, however, the Cameron government sought to establish a "realistic, sensible and practical" relationship with the US (Dumbrell, 2013, p.98).

Cameron's pragmatic view of the special relationship was shared by Obama. Although he had previously Cameron that "the US has no closer friend and stronger ally than the UK" (Dobson and Marsh, 2014, p.675), it was common knowledge that Obama did not regard the special relationship with the same degree of intensity as some of his

[217] Interview with Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall, Zoom, 9 May 2022.

predecessors. Some in London even described Obama as having "no real regard for the British."[218] Despite increased tensions within the alliance, British attachment to the special relationship remained solid. As Dobson and Marsh argued, Cameron continued to engage Obama "in an intricate diplomatic waltz as they sought to protect the special relationship whilst also cleansing it of the fall-out from the Blair-Bush years" (2014, p.686).

Although Obama was not an overtly 'Atlanticist' President, he understood the importance of maintaining strong US-UK relations. Nonetheless, the US began to geo-strategically pivot away from Europe towards the Asia-Pacific region, specifically China's "unchecked influence" (Lizza, 2011). This led to Obama's 2009 announcement of a drawdown of US troops from Iraq by 2014 and combat forces from Afghanistan (Xu and Rees, 2018, p.513). US plans to reduce its presence in the Middle East impacted the strategic nature of the special relationship as "the UK had less to offer its ally in the region" (ibid., p.514). The utility of the US-UK military relationship, in particular, was made more uncertain with the Cameron government's decision to cut defence spending following the 2008 financial crisis (ibid.). Obama allegedly told Cameron: "You have to pay your fair share" and warned No 10 that the UK could no longer claim a 'special relationship' if they did not meet the two percent NATO threshold on defence spending (Goldberg, 2016, p.261).

Washington's "cooler approach" towards its British ally certainly placed AAR in a weaker position than before (Fiddes, 2020, p.139), although it is important to bear in mind that, even before Cameron stepped foot in 10 Downing Street, Obama had showed signs of a waning interest in the alliance. In April 2008, while he was running for party nomination against candidate Hillary Clinton, Obama chose to make his European address in Berlin

[218] Interview with General Sir Simon Mayall, London, 7 December 2022.

rather than London, and neglected to use the phrase, 'special relationship' during his trip to the British capital (Dumbrell, 2013, p.95). Earning the reputation as "the least Anglophile American leader in living memory", some analysts concluded that Obama's rise to power marked the "end of the affair" between the US and UK (ibid.). Obama's pivot to Asia, combined with increasing levels of American isolationism and frustration over Europe's poor record of the sharing of the defence burden, increased Atlantic drift (Gannon, 2014, p.221), marking "a new age of transatlantic relations" (Dunn, 2008, p.1141).

Against this backdrop of increased dissipation between London and Washington, AAR looked less 'special' by the time that the Arab Spring erupted across the MENA region. This was also compounded by the UK's pursuit of a stronger bilateral relationship with France, albeit the UK and France still rivalled one another for influence in Libya. The UK's policy of "new bilateralism" with France (Dumbrell, 2013, p.99) was demonstrated by both countries' joint leadership in the drafting of resolution 1973, in controlling the pace of the diplomatic process, as well as in applying diplomatic pressure on Washington to reengage in the region. Although the special relationship continued to remain central to British defence and security strategy and London still looked to Washington as its main strategic partner, the UK was willing to bypass the US and develop strong military and political ties with other partners, such as France.

One issue, in particular, the call for a NFZ over Libya by Britain and France increased tensions within the Anglo-American alliance. Contrary to London and Paris, the White House, specifically President Obama and Secretary Gates, opposed implementing a NFZ to prevent a massacre in Libya (Dawson, 2022, p.368). Gates argued that a NFZ would be ineffective, and argued for the US and coalition partners to use "all necessary measures", which would authorise NATO to target Gaddafi's ground forces who were responsible for attacking Libyan civilians (Gates, 2020, p.299). Ultimately, this divergence

between the US and its European partners resulted in the UK pushing for a NFZ in Libya without US support. According to one senior British diplomat, on March 3, the French Foreign Minister had allegedly told the media that "the UK was drafting a NFZ resolution. This upset the Americans because they hadn't been consulted…".[219] On this occasion, London had agreed to work privately with France on the draft resolution; it appeared that the UK often found it easier to work with the French in New York than with the Americans.[220] As one senior British diplomat reflected: "The Americans are not instinctive multilateralists, and are often not comfortable negotiating in a multilateral forum like the United Nations…it was one of the reasons why we found it easier to work with the French".[221] Despite Obama's talk of making multilateralism a central tenet of US foreign policy, the US still had a reputation for pursuing a unilateral agenda.

### 5.72 Obama's reluctant engagement

On February 26, 2011, the US publicly called for Gaddafi to step down; this occurred two days after its European allies, France and Britain, had issued a similar call. While it would be incorrect to suggest that US operations were insignificant in Libya (as mentioned, American military power was crucial to the operation's success), the timing of US intervention in Libya signalled the kind of role the US wanted to play (Fiddes, 2020, p.142) - a supporting role to its European allies, contrasting with its traditional role of leading international intervention. There is debate surrounding the accuracy of the US 'leading from behind' in Libya (something this chapter seeks to address); however, the available evidence does suggest that the UK played a greater political and diplomatic role in Libya compared to its Atlantic ally. What can be surmised, is that Obama's reluctance to

[219] Interview with British diplomat, Zoom, 5 December 2022, name anonymised to protect individual's identity.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.

embroil the US in another protracted conflict overseas contributed towards heightened tensions between the White House and No 10.

America's reluctant engagement in Libya can be explained by the Obama administration's new foreign policy outlook as well as Obama's personal sense of moral realism. Heralded as Obama's "favourite philosopher", the works of Protestant theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, including his well-known 'Serenity Prayer',[222] is said to have guided Obama's outlook on everything from health care reform to counter-terrorism to foreign policy (Blake, 2010). Obama's belief in the idea that "there is serious evil in the world…" and that the US should "be humble and modest" (ibid.) in its approach to eliminate it was reflected by his administration's foreign policy outlook during the Arab Uprisings. In response to the hawkish American foreign policy during the Bush years, Obama advocated for a more "restrained" foreign policy that prioritised "the need for humility in the use of American power" (Rees, 2022, p.383).

Eager to extract the US from the 9/11 wars, Obama rooted his pragmatic, realist foreign policy in the principles of "common security interests, partnership and multilateralism" (Gerges, 2013, p.302) over adherence to one ideology and using "militant unilateralism" (ibid., p.301). Obama's mantra, "don't do stupid shit" (Rees, 2022, p.383), indicated that the US was becoming increasingly wary of entangling itself in foreign commitments which had previously drained American resources and eroded US credibility. As such, by late 2010 and early 2011, when the Arab Uprisings erupted across the MENA region, Obama initially resisted the urge to act, much to the disappointment and frustration of his European allies.

[222] Various iterations of Reinhold Niebuhr's 'Serenity Prayer' (1951) exist, but this is the most well-known version of the poem: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

There were valid reasons for the President's hesitation in Libya. Following his 2009 Cairo speech, where he advocated for "a new beginning with the Muslim community" (Rees, 2022, p.388), Obama sought to establish a new relationship between the US and the Middle East;[223] intervention in the Arab world was therefore unthinkable. Furthermore, some have argued that Obama had an inherent aversion to the Middle East. US Ambassador John Bolton put it candidly: "Obama just didn't like the Middle East, and he just didn't want to deal with the Middle East. He felt it was a drag on American resources."[224] However, as American journalist Jeffrey Goldberg has pointed out, Obama was not elected to office preoccupied with the Middle East; instead, his policies reflected those of a "classic, retrenchment President" (2016, p.262). As Goldberg put it, Obama "was not seeking new dragons to slay" (ibid., p.243).

Moreover, as the President communicated in the build-up to intervention in Libya, the US could no longer play the role of the world's policeman. During an address to the nation on March 28, 2011, Obama declared: "America cannot use our military wherever repression occurs. And given the costs and risks of intervention, we must always measure our interests against the need for action" (Obama, 2011a). According to US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, Obama would only consider using military force if it was multilateral with a legal mandate (2020, p.299). Obama's message regarding Libya was clear: the US would no longer take the lead; Europe would have to do the heavy-lifting. As Lord Ricketts commented: "The power dynamic was very different. This was America, taking second place and leaving the Europeans to lead."[225] Even though Obama eventually conceded to both domestic and external calls to intervene in Libya, it became evident to close allies, namely the UK and France, that US operations in Libya would remain limited

[223] Interview with Alistair Burt, Lancaster, 29 June 2022.
[224] Interview with Ambassador John Bolton, Zoom, 24 June 2022.
[225] Interview with Lord Peter Ricketts, Zoom, 23 June 2022.

in scope. As Secretary Gates reflected, "…while we took the lead in destroying Gaddafi's air defences, we then scaled back our involvement" (2020, p.299). Although the US provided the backbone of the military operation, Europe's requirement to deliver the bulk of strike missions was a notable break from traditional US practice. In fact, according to Chivvis, the US' role in Libya was more limited compared to any previous NATO intervention (2012, p.83).

As US involvement decreased in Libya, and the leadership of military operations was transferred to NATO on March 31, US allies witnessed a new era of American foreign policy in which the world's sole superpower would now 'lead from behind', a phrase that would later come to haunt Obama (Gates, 2020, p.300). Unsurprisingly, Obama's new vision for US military involvement in Libya came as "a shock" to US allies, notably the British who were accustomed to the traditional norm where Europe played a supporting role to US power.[226] As Sir Peter Westmacott, UK Ambassador to Washington from 2012 to 2016 put it, many in Europe felt that "the US had walked away" from the situation it had helped create, and that they had been "left in the lurch".[227] The UK was initially "frustrated by Obama's apparent caution" in Libya, but as Sir Nigel Sheinwald, UK Ambassador to the US from 2007 to 2012, noted, the UK took advantage of American unwillingness to lead.[228] While this was a departure from the traditional US-UK norm, the US' hesitancy to intervene gave the UK an opportunity to exert its great power status in the region. This will be explored later on in this chapter but as one British diplomat stated: "There was value in Cameron being seen as a successful warrior Prime Minister."[229] This suggests that status may have been a motivating factor behind Cameron's decision to intervene in Libya.

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[226] Ibid.
[227] Interview with Sir Peter Westmacott, Zoom, 3 May 2022.
[228] Interview with Sir Nigel Sheinwald, London, 21 July 2022.
[229] Interview with British diplomat and former member of the UK National Security Council, London, 22 July 2022, name anonymised to protect individual's identity.

Moreover, the White House's lack of consultation with No 10 in the build-up to intervention was another feature of the break in the norm that had previously defined US-UK relations during the Bush-Blair years. As John Casson, UK Ambassador to Egypt from 2014 to 2018 and one of David Cameron's national security advisers, reflected:

> The idea that Britain and America would be together when no one else would…that created this working level relationship that was very close to trust and share information…it became the expectation I then had when I came into Downing Street 10 years later…but that wasn't actually how it operated with Obama and Cameron…[230]

Casson recalled one particular incident from his time at No 10 where Washington by-passed London about creating a NFZ over Libya. As Cameron and Sarkozy urged Obama to join their call for a NFZ, "Obama went into one of these phases where he didn't say anything to us [No 10] for about 10 days…and then Obama rang up and he said 'Okay, David. We've done a lot of thinking about this…and here's what we're going to do…".[231] As noted, the US agreed to lead ten days of operations under Operation Odyssey Dawn after which Washington would transfer the leadership of operations to NATO. According to Casson, Obama's lack of consultation with its closest ally before a decision was reached about Libya was notable. As Casson stated: "It was the kind of approach we didn't really appreciate…we were slightly startled by how quickly they jumped that far ahead…".[232]

Although never rude in communications with his British counterpart,[233] President Obama's interactions with Cameron had become noticeably "cooler" (Fiddes, 2020, p.139) compared to previous administrations. For example, Obama and Cameron had reportedly "suspended" their personal phone calls following the UK and France's calls for a Security Council resolution for a NFZ, with Downing Street insisting to the White House that

[230] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Interview with Sir Nigel Sheinwald, London, 21 July 2022.

Cameron's "call for international leadership" was not a personal criticism directed against Obama (Dumbrell, 2013, p.99).

While AAR navigated another strained episode during Libya, the relationship persisted, nonetheless. Some have argued that what makes AAR qualitatively special is the generations of institutional engagement, not exclusively personal relations between ministers.[234] As General Sir Simon Mayall, Middle East Adviser to the MOD from 2011 to 2014, stated: "The special relationship should never be seen through the top level…politicians come and go, but this institutional relationship is really important."[235] Nonetheless, as this thesis has argued, personal relations between individual leaders matter, yet, at the same time, as the Cameron-Obama relationship has demonstrated, joint strategic interests, namely preventing a humanitarian catastrophe, and not deep emotional sentiment, is what preserved the special relationship irrespective of differences within the alliance.

### 5.8 Conclusion: Evidence of British influence?

As a result of pressure from pro-interventionists Susan Rice, Samantha Powers, other advisers within the White House and European partners, as well as achieving regional support and a legal mandate from the UNSC, Washington reluctantly agreed to intervene in Libya. Cameron's pressure on Obama eventually paid off. Obama's conditions for intervention had been met: European leadership, Arab League endorsement and UN resolution (Byman, 2013, p.313). The UK had successfully applied smart power to engage the US in Libya, even if the US would only play a 'supporting' role. As Cameron reflected in his memoir, the US "had come around because of the feeling that, if they were going to

[234] Interview with General Sir Simon Mayall, London, 7 December 2022.
[235] Ibid.

be involved at all, then any action ought to be decisive and effective" (Cameron, 2019, p.279). On the evening of March 18, Cameron spoke to Obama over the phone about the scope of US involvement in Libya. The US had promised one week of heavy military support to destroy Gaddafi's air defences, but then the British would be on their own. "You'll get our Tomahawks and Cruise missiles, then we'll take a less active approach" (Cameron, 2019, p.280). The UK welcomed the US' more comprehensive solution in Libya beyond an NFZ, although Washington's tone "took some getting used to" (ibid.). As Cameron reflected in his memoirs: "I was so used to America, the leader of the free world leading, that it was extraordinary to hear such reticence" (ibid.).

Still, the UK struggled to fully influence the full scope and direction of American intervention in Libya. On the one hand, the Obama administration had pledged US support, but it clarified that support would be limited and over a short period of time. As mentioned, ten days after the US first launched Operation Odyssey Dawn, on March 31, Obama ordered the transfer of leadership of military operations to NATO; the UK, and European allies could not keep the US in the driver's seat. NATO expanded its list of targets, beyond Gaddafi's air defences, to include any government installation.

Despite Obama's best intentions for a limited US military operation in Libya, circumstances on the ground forced a more substantial commitment, both in time and resource. NATO's shortage of precision bombs less than one month into the conflict highlighted the limitations of British, French and other European nations in leading a sustained military operation (DeYoung and Jaffe, 2011). The President's fears over Libya came to be realised; not only had the US been dragged into another potential long-term conflict in the MENA region, but once again, it would be forced to take on the lion's share of the campaign. After stating publicly that removing Gaddafi with US military force

would be a “mistake” (Gates, 2020, p.300), the US found itself in a position where it felt “blindsided by a bargain that asked for American support only in the initial phases, but that would now clearly require it in the long term” (Cameron, 2019, p.281). As Cameron recounted, AAR had hit another speedbump as Obama allegedly stated that “he would find it difficult to trust” the UK and France again (ibid.). Using a baseball analogy, Cameron described his desire for the US to remain engaged: “We just needed one more home run. Obama was unmoved” (ibid.).

The case of Libya explores the limits of smart power as a function of protecting the US-UK special relationship rather than using it as a means to exercise influence. Libya revealed that Anglo-American intervention was driven by fear, namely the risks of inaction, rather than as a means to exercise influence. As this chapter has discussed, in comparison to the close relationship between Bush and Blair during the 9/11 wars, the Obama-Cameron relationship experienced tension which, at times, left the alliance under periods of strain characterised by lack of consultation, infrequent communication and diverging views about their own country’s role in humanitarian intervention in the MENA region. Despite ‘cooler’ relations at the elite level, however, the relationship between the US President and British Prime Minister was still, at its core, of fundamental importance to the Anglo-American alliance. Both leaders still perceived the alliance as an “essential relationship” that was crucial to the exercise of each party’s foreign policy strategy, but “devoid of over-sugary sentiment” (Dumbrell, 2012).

This underscores the truth that alliances matter in the foreign policy calculations of nations; however, they also depend on an evolving strategic context. Although US priorities had begun to look East and Washington no longer saw Europe as an “an object of security concerns” (Hallams and Schreer, 2012, p.319), Libya revealed that the world’s

"lonely superpower" (Huntington, 1999) still needed its allies (Dobson and Marsh, 2014, p.691). The eruption of the Arab Uprisings forced the US to shift its attention back to the MENA region, where it relied on the UK, other European allies and coalition partners, to lead the diplomatic process and to help execute military operations. While Obama was averse to intervening in Libya from the very beginning, he recognised that the US had more to lose if it did not act. Irrespective of the tensions that existed between London and Washington, Obama still exhibited an understanding of British and European interests. As two senior American officials observed, a main reason why the US intervened in Libya was due to the simple fact that it mattered to America's allies. "Had it not been for British and French pressure, we would not have done it…", stated Robert Gates.[236] "The argument that was made in the Situation Room was that it's not vital to our national interest…Obama justified doing this because it was important to our allies."[237] As Gates argued in his memoir, because Libya was important to US allies, it became in the national interest to intervene (2020, p.321).

In sum, Libya demonstrates the importance of smart power by highlighting what London and Washington had to lose had either side diverged over policy in Libya. The fear of endangering the special relationship ultimately influenced the US and the UK to remain on the same page, despite each party's frustrations with the other over the nature and duration of intervention. While Obama was reluctant to engage in another overseas conflict, especially in the MENA region, he recognised that the US had more to lose if it decided against joining the British-French intervention in Libya. However, "seasons change and in the Middle East, spring was over" (McMaster, 2020, p.259); the unfolding crisis in Syria would, once again, test the resilience of the alliance.

[236] Interview with Secretary Robert Gates, Zoom, 7 July 2022.
[237] Ibid.

# Chapter 6. Syria

*"People always say never again, but they never want to do anything."* (President Barack Obama to Ben Rhodes, 2013)

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the UK's alliance with the US during the Syrian civil war, from the outbreak of conflict in March 2011 to September 2013, when the US decided against using military force in response to the CW attack on the Damascus suburb of Ghouta by the Assad regime that August. Through the framework of smart power, this chapter benchmarks Anglo-American relations over Syria to explore whether the UK was successful in influencing US policy. Like Libya, Syria was selected as a case study as it tests the Anglo-American alliance across a distinct contextual setting in the MENA region – intervention amidst a humanitarian crisis and the management of regional disorder following the 2011 Arab Uprisings. The Syria case highlights the limits of British smart power particularly against a backdrop of cooler personal relations at the elite level of the alliance and the legacy of a bitter intervention in Libya which was waged on the back of R2P.

The chapter begins with a short synopsis of events leading up to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 followed by an examination of the UK's role in the conflict. Like the previous three chapters, this chapter seeks to reconceptualise the special relationship by applying the smart power framework against this case of Anglo-American intervention to understand how the UK exercised smart power in Syria. As such, it examines whether British intervention was complementarian; if regional contexts were a factor in the UK's efforts to influence US policy; how the UK utilised its perception of the 'special

relationship' with the US to advance its interests; and the role that the politics of personal relations played in the UK's ability to project influence.

### 6.2 The making of a tragedy

As in other countries across the MENA region in early 2011, Syria descended into chaos in the wake of the Arab Uprisings but "revolution did not spring up overnight" (Ziadeh, 2015, p.230). Before one can examine the outbreak of the Syrian civil war between the Assad regime and anti-government protestors in March 2011, it is important to trace the series of events leading up to that inflection point. After first gaining independence from France in 1945 and then breaking from the UAR in 1961 under President Nasser of Egypt, Syria fell under the control of General Hafiz al Assad, the leader of the military arm of the Ba'ath Party in Syria by 1970 (Fiddes, 2020, p.163) following a bloodless intraparty coup (Wilson, 2012, p.10). Although Assad implemented an authoritarian government that repressed opposition groups, his policies, which promoted land reform, education, economic development and adopted a tough stance on Israel, were largely popular amongst the heterogenous Syrian population (Seale, 1988, pp.169-184).

Assad's reputation for brutality grew in February 1982 when government forces used heavy artillery bombardments, airstrikes and house-to-house clearances to quell an uprising launched by the conservative Sunni Muslim Brotherhood in the city of Hama (Wilson, 2012, p.18; Fiddes, 2020, p.164). In addition to one-third of Hama being destroyed (Seale, 1988, p.334), it is estimated that around 25,000 people perished in the fighting (Van Dam, 1996, pp. 111-117). Although the 'Hama massacre' is not the subject of this thesis, it provides important context into the history of the Assad regime's iron grip on power as well as the underlying sectarian tensions between the powerful Alawite

minority, to which the Assad family belonged, and the Sunni Syrian majority who were persecuted by them. Hafiz' son, Bashar al Assad, who assumed power in 2000 following his father's death (Fiddes, 2020, p.164), was deemed to be a more open, modern and progressive leader who spoke of reforming his father's authoritarian government. However, the events that unfolded in early 2011 illustrated a dark truth about Syria's ruling family: "when Syria's Ba'ath regime feels its back up against the wall, it always resorts to Hama rules" (Friedman, 2005).

The age-old adage 'like father like son' rang true when Bashar continued his father's legacy of using brutal tactics and violent crackdowns to repress the opposition despite hopes that Bashar would liberalise Syria. In 2001, Syrians protested the regime's attack of political and press freedom, as well as the practice of imprisoning opposition figures, in what has been referred to as the 'Damascus Spring' (Ziadeh, 2015, pp.230-233), a precursor to the Arab Uprisings in 2011, but the movement lost momentum by mid-2002 (Fiddes, 2020, p.164). Moreover, in 2006, Syria endured a four-year drought which led to increased food prices and the mass migration of thousands of farmers into the cities that were already overpopulated and underdeveloped (ibid., p.162). Ongoing political corruption, economic hardships facing millions of Syrians, repression of the Sunni-majority by the Assad family by an Alawite Muslim minority (which only comprised 15 per cent of the population) and the influx of more than a million refugees from the war in Iraq made Syria "ripe for an explosion" (Gates, 2020, p.303). By the time that the so-called 'Arab Spring' had reached Syria in early 2011, the revolutionary spark landed in a highly flammable environment where decades of brutal oppression and abuse, economic hardship and social conflict had been "poured onto the tinderbox" (Fiddes, 2020, p.162).

The Syrian civil war began on the streets of Daraa on March 6, 2011, when Assad's security forces arrested, tortured and killed fifteen teenage boys who were caught

graffitiing “The people want the fall of the regime” (Wilson, 2012, p.11; Gates, 2020, p.302). Daraa citizens took to the streets in protest (Fiddes, 2020, p.165); on March 15, demonstrations spread to Damascus demanding reform which elicited a violent response from government forces (Gates, 2020, p.302). In late March, as protests intensified and became more widespread, Assad offered concessions which included expanding press and political freedoms (Fiddes, 2020, p.165) as well as lifting the Emergency Law, which had subjugated Syrians to martial law since 1963 (US Department of State, 2012). However, these concessions fell on deaf ears as the Assad government continued to use ‘Hama rules’ to quell demonstrations (Wilson, 2012, p.11). On March 25, thousands of people took to the streets in a series of nationwide protests only to be met with lethal force by security forces (Fiddes, 2020, p.165). Instead of supressing the insurrection however, the government’s use of force only further galvanised Syrian protestors.

By April, the end-goal amongst protestors had also begun to shift from government reform to overthrowing Assad (Gates, 2020, p.302). Between April 22 and 25, Syria experienced its “bloodiest day yet” (Lesch, 2012, p.97) as government forces launched large-scale attacks killing hundreds of civilians (Gates, 2020, pp.302-303). By now, the indiscriminate use of violence had gained the attention of Western powers, who grew increasingly aware of the potential security threats emanating from the unfolding crisis in Syria - regional instability, sectarian conflict and the proliferation and use of chemical weapons (Phillips, 2022, p.140). In a press statement on April 22, 2011, President Obama condemned the Assad regime for its refusal to implement reforms and demanded that the “outrageous use of violence to quell protests must come to an end” (Obama, 2011b).

Almost eighteen months had passed between March 2011, when non-violent protests first erupted, and July 2012, when the International Committee of the Red Cross declared Syria to be in a state of a civil war (Khatib et al., 2017). During this period,

Western powers moved away from framing the Syrian conflict as a quest for reform and liberalisation to a full-blown and protracted military conflict governed by the centrifugal force of sectarianism. While efforts were made by the international community to find a solution, the UNSC was unable to perform its role of global legal arbiter while a distinct lack of appetite for military intervention marked the approach of Western powers. Despite this, on August 18, 2011, in a joint statement President Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for regime change in Syria and urged Assad "to step aside" (Obama, 2011c). Still, according to Ben Rhodes, Obama's deputy national security adviser, the administration believed that internal pressure, not external intervention, should "cause the regime to crumble" (Gates, 2020, pp.303-304).

Western concerns over Assad using CW grew as reports emerged in July 2012 that the regime was preparing to use CW or transfer them to Hezbollah and other militant groups (Rhodes, 2018, p.223). Having previously stated that Assad would "be held accountable by the international community" if his regime used CW, just one month later Obama drew his famous 'red line'. On August 20, 2012, when the President was asked about what would cause the US to use military force in Syria, Obama replied: "We have been very clear to the Assad regime that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilised. That would change my calculus." (Obama, 2012b). Meanwhile, reports of the Syrian army using CW continued to emerge (Gates, 2020, p.307) although these reports were difficult to verify (Rhodes, 2018, p.224). If the Iraq crisis had taught the Western intelligence community anything, it was to be wary of making snap judgements. On August 21, 2013, Assad's forces launched a massive chemical attack on Ghouta in Damascus killing over a thousand civilians, including 426 children (White House, 2013). In a letter dated August 29, written to David Cameron from

Jon Day, the Chairman of the JIC, the British intelligence community concluded that "it was highly likely that the regime was responsible for the CW attacks on August 21."[238] UN chemical weapons inspectors also confirmed the use of the nerve agent Sarin in attacks near Damascus although they refused to attribute blame (Loft, Sturge and Kirk-Wade, 2023, pp.3-4).

Much has been written within the literature on the Syrian conflict about the international community's response (or lack thereof), specifically the shortcomings made by Western powers in their handling of the crisis (Gallagher, 2014; Henriksen and Schack, 2015; Phillips, 2015; Halliyadde, 2016; Droz-Vincent, 2020; Nwokoye, 2023). This thesis does not present an analogue of events detailing the Syrian conflict or to reflect on the lessons learned from the West's response to the Syrian civil war. However, it does highlight some key inflection points during the conflict to understand the Anglo-American approach to intervention in Syria and, in particular, to explore whether London was successful in influencing Washington's foreign policy preferences there.

The first inflection point in the Syrian conflict was the development of an armed rebel opposition that began to appear across the country by midsummer 2011. On July 29, 2011, a group of Syrian army officers who had defected from Assad's forces had announced the formation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA); marking the uprising's transition from rebellion to civil war (Gates, 2020, p.303). Under the leadership of Colonel Riad Assad, who had defected from the Syrian air force, the FSA was created to bring cohesion to the "patchwork of forces", many who were focused primarily on providing security to their local communities (Khatib et al., 2017). Furthermore, in October 2011, the Syrian National Council (SNC), the first coherent formation of the Syrian political opposition,

[238] Jon Day to David Cameron, 'Syria: Reported Chemical Weapon Use', 29 August 2013.

was formed  consisting of a “hodgepodge of exiles, intellectuals and secular dissidents…” (ibid.) While their initial objective was to secure international support and called for civil disobedience over acts of violence, by the spring of 2012 the SNC changed its policy of non-violence as a result of deteriorating conditions on the ground and a lack of Western response. These developments are important to consider when examining Anglo-American intervention in Syria as London and Washington wrestled with the legality and effectiveness of providing non-lethal, and later lethal, assistance to the opposition, as this chapter will later explore.

The second inflection point in the Syrian conflict takes place two years later in August 2013 when the US pursued a diplomatic solution in response to the Assad regime crossing Obama’s red line with the attack on Ghouta. Obama’s red line has been well documented within the literature and has been the subject of countless books and publications (Chollet, 2016; Goldberg, 2016; Kerry, 2018; Rhodes, 2018; Gates, 2020; Warrick, 2021), and while these contributions are important for understanding US policy in Syria, it is not the core focus of this thesis. Rather, this chapter seeks to explore the role of British influence on US decision-making in the West’s intervention in the Syrian conflict. As such, Obama’s red line will be examined within this context.

### 6.3 The UK’s role in Syria

As in Libya, the UK exercised a greater leadership role in Syria although there was a notable gap between Britain’s rhetoric and its actions. The UK led “the Western international community’s diplomatic opposition to Assad” (Phillips, 2022, p.140) in the following ways: by pressing for economic sanctions against the Assad regime (Simpson, 2011, p.61); by pursuing two UNSC draft resolutions (one in October 2011 and the second in February 2012) that condemned the Syrian government (ibid.) and that would allow “all

necessary measures" to protect Syrian civilians (Fiddes, 2020, p.178); by pushing for weapons inspectors to gain entry to Syria's CW sites (Phillips, 2022, p.140); and by supporting 'Action for Syria' peace negotiations in Geneva (Fiddes, 2020, p.170). Despite Britain's best intentions, however, most of these efforts failed.

Drawing on Holsti's work on NRC's, James Strong argued that the UK also played the role of the 'responsible great power' in Syria (2018, p.380); although as noted, this thesis positions the UK as a Global Middle Power. According to one former British diplomat, the Cameron government believed that the UK had a moral responsibility to condemn Assad and his use of force against the opposition, and believed that he needed to be removed from power to prevent collateral damage in the region and beyond, specifically: terrorism, regional instability and an unsustainable flow of refugees to European borders. [239] There was a growing fear amongst European capitals that Assad was weaponising the refugee problem. Cameron himself was described as "the most forceful advocate of intervention in Syria among Western leaders" (The Economist, 2013). Cameron raised the question shortly after US intelligence officials confirmed that Assad had crossed a red line on June 14, 2013: "What are we going to do about the fact that in our world today there is a dictator and brutal leader who is using chemical weapons under our noses against his own people?" (Evening Standard, 2013). As such, UK policy on Syria was considered to be "out in front of American thinking". As one diplomat stated, "The UK came out of the Libya experience 'thinking it had been a good exercise' and that on Syria they actively tried to convince the US 'to push the boundaries of its policy'" (Ralph, Holland and Zhekova, 2017, p.883).

[239] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.

As noted, the UK played a crucial role in leading the Western diplomatic campaign against Assad. But Cameron was unable to fulfil his stated objectives, notably by punishing Assad for his use of CW and toppling the regime, hamstrung as he was by his own miscalculations and parliamentary politicking. Moreover, once it had become evident that Assad would not fall quickly, Downing Street failed to anticipate the Obama administration backing away from using force.

In addition to leading the Western community in publicly condemning Assad, the UK also led efforts to support the Syrian opposition. As diplomatic deadlock prevented the UN Security Council from acting, the UK refused to "sit on the side-lines" (Hague, 2011). The UK was one of the first Western powers to initiate talks with the Syrian opposition, specifically the SNC and FSA, in November 2011 (Ralph, Holland and Zhekova, 2017, p.889), and took the lead in announcing official recognition of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as "the sole representative of the people of Syria" (Cameron, 2019, p.451). According to Cameron, "America followed suit a couple of weeks later" (ibid.). Alongside the US and Western allies, the UK created an international support group, based on their experience in Libya, called the 'Friends of Syria' group which consisted of over sixty states that had previously met with the SNC in Tunis back in February 2012 (ibid.) as part of the Syria peace plan organised by UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton (Gates, 2020, p.305).

The main issue on the table for Western powers was whether to arm the opposition. As Cameron opined, the FSA consisted of hundreds of groups committed to a democratic future in Syria, including "legitimate Muslim Brotherhood-style Islamic groups" (Cameron, 2019, p.448). The opposition, however, was also infiltrated with radical extremists and jihadists, such as the al-Nusra (later to become ISIS), who "saw Islamist

ideology" as the key to Syria's future (ibid.). In contrast to London's posture towards the opposition, Washington wanted more time to "evaluate the Syrian opposition" before committing resources (Clinton, 2014, p.392), a clear contrast to the UK which played "a very active role" and operated as the "driving force" behind the decision to support the rebel groups (Ralph, Holland and Zhekova, 2017, p.890). Although the UK "took the lead" (Phillips, 2022, p.141) and positioned itself "out in front" (Ralph, Holland and Zhekova, 2017, p.891) among Western powers in training and aiding the Syrian opposition, it only supplied non-lethal assistance to the more 'moderate' rebel groups (Cameron, 2019, p.449; Betti, 2020, p.136; Phillips, 2022, p.141). The UK looked to be seen as leading the Syrian 'war on terror' although the arms embargo and the West's scepticism of the rebel groups meant that this strategy lacked real substance to be truly effective.

In addition to pushing for more active support for the anti-Assad rebel groups, the UK also took the lead in pressing for punitive military action in Syria (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2014). By August 2011, just six months following the outbreak of the protests in Daraa, the UK had committed to a policy of overthrowing the Assad regime, yet it lacked the means to do so. Despite London's show of diplomatic leadership and hawkish stance towards Syria, especially in the days following the CW attack in Ghouta, the UK had limited military levers to pull. As NATO's 2011 Operation Unified Protector in Libya had demonstrated, the UK had limited capabilities to act militarily without assistance from their closest ally. In reality, British strategy in Syria "hinged on US support" (Cameron, 2019, p.451).

Other factors too contributed towards the UK's inability to participate in missile strikes, including: the burden of the global financial crisis, war fatigue and the lack of political will, as demonstrated by Cameron's inability to mobilise his own party as well as the opposition Labour party, which led to his surprise defeat in a Commons vote on

military action in August 2013. As such, Downing Street pressed the White House to consider using limited military force against Assad. Only Washington had the capacity to coordinate a training operation that would give the opposition "the decisive edge on the battlefield" (ibid.). As Cameron wrote in his memoir, upon Obama's re-election in 2012, Cameron was quick to press him on Syria hoping for increased US commitment: "Syria is the foreign policy issue which will define your second term" (ibid.). However, like Cameron, Obama also faced escalatory political pressures at home and feared embroiling the US in another protracted overseas conflict. Thus, in a quick turnaround, Obama reneged on his initial plan to use military airstrikes to punish the Assad regime for its use of CW and to deter future attacks; a development which will be discussed later in this chapter.

### 6.4 Complementarity in Syria

Of the four cases of Anglo-American intervention in the Middle East examined, Syria arguably had the strongest *casus belli* for just intervention, yet Western powers and regional actors failed to pursue collective action and to prevent one of the worst humanitarian crises since the Second World War (McMaster, 2020, p.263). In contrast to Libya, where multiple tools of national power were used, in Anglo-American intervention in Syria was largely uncoordinated and limited in scope (Droz-Vincent, 2020, p.118), and illustrated an inconsistent approach to the Arab Uprisings characterised by ad hoc actions. For example, intervention was undertaken in Libya but not in other Arab states, like Syria and Bahrain, that also experienced major democratic protests. Syria presented an opportunity for the UK, as well as the US, to support stability and to promote reform in the region, but both powers were constrained by domestic pressures, war-weariness at home and, of course, the shadow of Iraq. All these factors combined limited a coherent and forceful response to the Assad regime's use of CW against its own citizens.

The UK, alongside the US, used a variety of instruments of hard power (economic sanctions and arming rebel groups) and soft power (pursuing UNSC resolutions, supporting peace negotiations, securing regional support from the Arab League and supplying humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians); however, these methods proved unsuccessful in preventing Assad from massacring civilians and using CW. As the number of civilian deaths increased, and reports about CW usage emerged (Rhodes, 2018, pp.223-224) the Assad regime proved able to withstand economic and diplomatic pressure by Western powers. As such, by the summer 2013, it became evident to both the US and the UK that limited, low-level force would be the only method capable of punishing Assad. However, as this chapter will examine, neither the UK nor the US were willing to use force, while the Cameron government failed to convince the Obama administration to intervene unilaterally. It is important, however, to recognise these 'softer' instruments of power that were deployed in Syria.

### 6.41 Diplomatic and economic pressure

Once London and Washington realised that Assad would avoid the same fate as neighbouring Arab dictators in Egypt and Tunisia, they looked to apply both pressure from above, via diplomatic activity and support from the international community, and pressure from within via the Syrian opposition. This took many forms. Economically, the US, UK and European allies imposed a series of sanctions against the Assad regime (Wilson, 2012, p.10; Fiddes, 2020, p.166). In May 2011, Obama signed three executive orders that froze US-based assets of Assad and his inner circle, banned exports and investments in Syria as well as banned business dealings and imports of Syrian oil (Gates, 2020, p.303). The EU followed suit by blacklisting Assad and other senior government officials, which imposed a travel ban and asset freeze on the regime (Fiddes, 2020, p.166).

Diplomatically, both Obama and Cameron valued a multilateral approach and achieving international consensus. Largely due to the work of UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, the UK and France alongside the US, sought to secure a UNSC resolution in October 2011. However, Russia warned that Syria was Libya 2.0, another case of Western powers using the UNSC to facilitate regime change under the guise of humanitarian intervention. The "Syria is not Libya (but it could be Iraq)" discourse blocked any attempt of unity between Security Council members (Ralph, Holland and Zhekova, 2017, p.886). Not only did Russia and China veto the resolution due to the wording around sanctions, which the UK agreed to amend in another draft, but Russia and China vetoed the resolution on the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. (Fiddes, 2020, p.167). Statements from US, UK and French delegates subsequently demonstrated frustration over the inability of the international community to unite around a resolution to condemn the violence. Hilary Clinton criticised the Security Council for its inaction and urged the international community to "stand with the people of Syria and the region or become complicit in the continuing violence" (Clinton, 2014, p.379). One senior British diplomat, who worked in the Cameron government during the Arab Uprisings, reflected on the high drama from the Security Council debates in which concerns were raised about the perception of the West exceeding the mandate, as it was perceived in Libya.

> Even though the text had nothing to do with military authorisation, they [Russia] said, 'This is going to be the thin end of the wedge like what went down in Libya, and you'll soon be taking military action…that was the moment that killed any opportunity for the international community to militarily intervene in Syria until August 2013.[240]

Moscow's message to the West was clear: "Don't expect the same compliance over Syria as you had in Libya" (Fiddes, 2020, p.166).

[240] Interview with British diplomat, Zoom, 5 December 2022, name anonymised to protect individual's identity.

Moreover, the Arab League issued a resolution calling for a ceasefire (Halliyade, 2016, p.222), but later voted to suspend Syria's membership and imposed sanctions against the regime once it became apparent that Assad had no intention of implementing the provisions from its proposed peace plan (Fiddes, 2020, pp.167-168). Additionally, in January 2012, the Arab League proposed a draft resolution to the UNSC which called for an end to violence by the regime and a peaceful transition to Syria's vice-president, Farouk al-Shara (ibid., p.168). Despite pressure from the West and regional support from Arab states, neither Russia nor China would be co-opted into another resolution. Although there was no appetite to deploy military force from the West or Arab allies, it was evident that neither the economic nor diplomatic instruments of power had constrained Syria's behaviour. Meanwhile, Assad's forces continued to carry out violent attacks against civilians amid reports of the threat and actual use of CW. At the Friends of Syrian People Conference held in Tunisia in February 2012, delegates began calling for the arming of rebel groups to help overthrow Assad (Mohammed and Lowe, 2012). However, at this juncture Washington and London still remained at odds over the use of military force.

### 6.42 Regime change and arming the opposition

Regardless of the West's hawkish tone on Syria, Obama remained sceptical of military intervention in Syria, as he had demonstrated in Libya (Ashton, 2022, p.364). Regime change had dominated US foreign policy in the MENA region since 9/11, but Syria now demonstrated that Obama was willing to "go against the wisdom in Washington" (Putin vs the West, 2022). As Secretary of Defence, Leon Panetta, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2012, Obama preferred to "build multilateral, international consensus" and to "maintain regional support from the Arab world" (Panetta, 2012), via the UN and Arab League, to put pressure on the regime. This

was congruent with Obama's personal views on US leadership and interventionism; successful intervention in Libya had "depended on cohesion of the alliance, that was the centre of gravity".[241] As Ben Rhodes, Obama's foreign policy advisor opined, the administration was "counting on the building pressure on Assad from within to be met with growing isolation from abroad in a way that would cause the regime to crumble" (2018, p.158).  Obama, he argued, believed that intervention "would compound the tragedy" in Syria. He therefore kept searching for other options beyond military force, "finding none" (ibid., p.339) as economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure failed to deter Assad.

London did not see an issue with executing a limited "Libya-style approach" in Syria. Rather, they feared a "lack of intervention" would only bolster Assad's forces (Cameron, 2019, p.459). According to Cameron, the major difference between Obama and himself was that he did not accept the argument that "any intervention would put us on a slippery slope to tens of thousands of our troops on the ground" (ibid., p.458). As Cameron argued in his memoir, "just because you can't do everything doesn't mean you can't do anything" (ibid., p.453); The US remained reluctant, however, to deploy force. US reticence posed a problem for Britain because, like Libya, the UK was dependent on Washington's willingness to lead the bulk of military contributions should military power be authorised. As such, the UK' response to Syria was "conditional on the outcomes of the policy debate in Washington" (Ashton, 2022, p.363).

Alongside Merkel, Sarkozy and Obama, Cameron had publicly called for Assad to go in August 2011 (Cameron, 2019, p.449), but UK policy in Syria focused initially on pursuing a "political outcome" (Putin vs the West, 2022). Cameron questioned whether

[241] Interview with Lieutenant General Ralph Jodice, Zoom, 11 March 2022.

Syria's brutal dictatorship could be part of the solution (2019, p.449), and proposed instead that the UK ally with a new provisional government to "take out al-Nusra and other extremists and terrorists" (Putin vs the West, 2022). Yet, Cameron's government was divided over the issue of regime change, in particular, the "Iraq war-obsessed Lib Dems and non-interventionists" (Ashton, 2022, p.363) and military and intelligence services who were stuck in their "Iraq and Afghanistan mindsets" (Cameron, 2019, p.450). The UK never could have allowed for significant troop numbers on the ground, plus an Iraq-style invasion would have been "unsellable at home and abroad" (ibid., p.450). In his memoir, Cameron recounted an exchange between himself and national security advisor, Kim Darroch, over Whitehall's trepidation to act. Faced with the UK military's approach of "all or nothing" on one side and the FCO's approach of "almost nothing", Cameron replied in frustration: "This has to stop – just tell people to caveat what they say!" (ibid., p.452). Evidently, the ghosts of Iraq still loomed over Whitehall.

In August 2012 the UK began providing non-lethal assistance including body armour, communications equipment and medical supplies to the rebel groups, although Parliament rejected the use of military force against the Assad regime (Kettle, 2022, p.85). Nonetheless, Cameron was determined to "shift the dial" towards providing weapons and training to give the opposition "any chance against the regime" (Cameron, 2010, p.452). To Cameron's frustration, US policy on arming the opposition remained indecisive and General Petraeus' "train, equip, mentor programme", which eventually began in January 2013, did little to assist the opposition (ibid., p.453). Petraeus' small-scale recommendation to engage the 'moderate' opposition was designed to give them "sufficient resource to fight but not enough to win" (Phillips, 2022, p.142). Moreover, it was acknowledged that its 'training programme' would not alter the direction of the conflict (Rhodes, 2018, p.197). As Rhodes reflected, the US approach to arming the rebel

groups “spoke to the hubris in American foreign policy to think we could engineer the Syrian opposition whom we barely knew” (ibid., p.198).

In sum, between US vacillation over supporting the opposition and internal divisions within London, Cameron described the West’s response as “right direction, insufficient force” (2019, p.451). Cameron wanted to do more but was hamstrung militarily without its closest ally. Britain’s lack of power in Syria made it a “victim of its own policies” (Phillips, 2022, p.142). Cameron had miscalculated American willingness to deploy force, thinking that Obama would authorise military intervention in the event that Assad did not succumb to international diplomatic pressure. As Obama told Cameron at the G8 summit in Northern Ireland in June 2013, “The only event which would prompt American intervention would be a major CW attack” (Ashton, 2022, p.364); however, that alone would not justify “to get in there big-time and topple the regime” (Cameron, 2019, p.358). Obama would later regret this ultimatum as the CW attack in Ghouta certainly tested US resolve.

Although Western efforts failed in Syria, some commentators point to the Kerry-Lavrov framework that removed and destroyed 1300 tons of CW from Syria (Kerry, 2018, p.541) as an illustration of coercive diplomacy being used successfully as an instrument of foreign policy statecraft. As Derek Chollet, a former senior Pentagon official in the Obama administration noted: “We ended up getting rid of a weapons of mass destruction threat that was worse than what the CIA wrongly estimated was in Iraq, for which we went to war. Why is that considered a failure?” (Crowley, 2016). By an act of diplomacy, the US managed to deter Assad from using CW and to eliminate Syria’s CW stockpiles, thus preventing future usage and ensuring regional stability, all without using military force (it has since been discovered that Assad had, in fact, cheated UN teams and never completely destroyed all his stockpiles). At the time, however, the outcome in Syria was considered a

political success, yet some raised concerns about the implications of Obama's failure to enforce his red line.

The UK exercised smart power in Syria although none of the hard and soft power tools were successful in preventing Assad from massacring civilians or toppling the regime. On the one hand, action in Syria illustrated diplomatic power used successfully, but it also highlighted the issue of the perception of power as a driver of state behaviour (Kerry, 2018, p.528). By not using force to punish Assad for using CW, a global weapons norm was violated and the perception of America's standing tough over the use of WMD was undermined (Rimland, 2014). Obama's unwillingness to play the traditional US role of global policeman, in this case, to punish a regime for its use of WMD, to prevent further atrocities and to enforce an international norm, "left the door open to Putin to strengthen Russia's military position in the region" (Ricketts, 2021, p.5) and "to make Russia great again by restoring Soviet-era global reach" (Tisdall, 2018). US deterrent credibility, which had maintained the international order since the end of the Second World War, was at stake in Syria. As Goldberg argued, Obama's decision to seek Congressional approval to authorise military force in Syria was the day the US stopped being "the world's sole indispensable power" (2016, p.243). Obama's decision to not enforce his red line was seen by Moscow as a fundamental shift, namely that the "post-Iraq America was retreating from its global policeman role" (Tisdall, 2018). The US "abrogation of leadership in the region" (Indyck, 2016) arguably gave Putin an opening" (Tisdall, 2018). As Alistair Burt later argued, "There are no vacuums…because we didn't intervene, somebody else did".[242] Putin, who had long argued against Western military intervention, had exploited US inaction to do just that in Syria and ultimately kept Assad in power (Putin vs the West, 2022). In sum, while Assad was deterred from using CW, Western inaction still came at a

[242] Interview with Alistair Burt, Lancaster, 29 June 2022.

cost. As Martin Indyk (2016) has argued, Obama's determination to keep the US out of another foreign war "marked the unravelling of the US-dominant Middle Eastern order" as it relinquished its position as the regional hegemon.

## 6.5 The role of context

### 6.51 "On the right side of history"

It is important to consider the realities on the ground for both the US and UK at the time when a potential intervention in Syria was being mooted. As in Libya, the US and the UK were guided by the doctrine of R2P in order to prevent the slaughter of civilians by the Assad regime. Intervention did not directly benefit Western interests, but Washington and London felt there was a moral imperative to act. As noted, the US did not initially regard Syria as a national security issue, yet the view on this changed once CW were brought into the equation. When John Kerry became US Secretary of State in early 2013, he declared that "Assad possessed the world's largest stock of undeclared chemical weapons" (Kerry, 2018, p.525). Given the legacy of Iraq, it is somewhat ironic that the US deemed an Arab dictator and the possession of WMD as an existential threat to US national security interests. According to Kerry, Assad's indiscriminate use of CW was "exactly the scenario that had most worried" those in Washington (ibid.). Similarly, on the evening of August 29, 2013, the day of Cameron's defeat in Parliament, lawmakers in Washington poured over intelligence briefings on CW attacks in Syria as the White House continued to weigh its options for a potential military strike, regarding their use as both a violation of international norms but also, as Representative Eliot Engel, the Ranking Democrat on the Foreign Affairs Committee called it, "a national security threat to the United States" (Ohlheiser, 2013).

For the UK, in particular, there was a sense that it had a moral imperative to call for Assad's removal from power, and that R2P provided the legal justification for action (Ralph, Holland and Zhekova, 2017, p.881). As Sir Peter Westmacott stated, "there was not any big strategic interest" but Syria was "purely humanitarian motivated".[243] Casson argued that Cameron's primary motivation behind intervention was the fear that more Syrians would die if it did not step in and stop the bloodshed.[244] Still, Cameron argued that British national interests were at stake, suggesting that destabilisation of Syria and the wider region would lead to a flow of refugees to Europe (Ashton, 2022, pp.362-363). Cameron feared that if Assad remained in power, "it would mean more terrorism for Britain" (Cameron, 2019, p.453). However, Cameron's positioning of Syria as a national security threat may have been an intentional framing of the issue to convince the war-weary British public and its closest ally, the US, to assist the Syrian opposition.

As in Libya, the Syrian conflict, was also seen as part of a larger movement within history, much like the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Shah in Iran in 1979. This desire "to be in the right side of history" by supporting the opposition, who were portrayed as "riding a wave of history" (Byman, 2013, p.290), was shared by both London and Washington, and served as guiding doctrines for both states' policies throughout the Arab Uprisings (Rhodes, 2018; Mayall, 2020, p.271; Phillips, 2022). As US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, remarked during the outbreak of protests in Tunisia and Egypt, "For the United States, supporting democratic transitions is not a matter of idealism. It is a strategic necessity," (Clinton, 2012). As mentioned previously, this moral imperative to intervene in Syria was congruent with Britain's role as a Global Middle Power with humanitarian responsibilities to promote human rights and to uphold the rule of law; again,

[243] Interview with Sir Peter Westmacott, Zoom, 3 May 2022.
[244] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.

these align with the ‘influential rule of law state’ and ‘opportunist-interventionist’ role orientations identified by Gaskarth. Between early 2011 and summer 2013, the Cameron government framed the debate through this role expectation by emphasising Britain’s “moral obligation to help save lives” (Hague, 2013, pp.483-490). Ironically, despite Cameron’s painful efforts to distance himself from Blair and his ‘doctrine of international community’ the Cameron government’s policy of ‘liberal conservatism’ evoked New Labour’s ‘liberal interventionism’, as Cameron sought to use force for humanitarian purposes (Strong, 2015a, pp.1127-1128). Effectively, Cameron remained under Blair’s shadow.

It is also important to highlight that R2P as a norm was unevenly applied by Western powers during the Arab Uprisings. In contrast to NATO intervention in Libya months before, “there was no Benghazi to be saved” in Syria (Rhodes, 2018, p.157) despite more people being killed in Syria than in Libya. In fact, by 2012, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) estimated over twenty thousand civilian deaths in Syria since the outbreak of the uprising (SOHR, 2020) compared to Ban Ki Moon’s report of over a thousand deaths in Libya one month prior to Western intervention (BBC, 2011). As Fiddes has argued, Syria was a “clear illustration of the political rather than humanitarian role that the new Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm performed” (2020, p.172). The use of CW changed Washington’s calculus.

Moreover, London felt that it could not refrain from punishing the Assad regime for its violence against civilians, including the use of CW, and to deter Assad and other dictatorial regimes from using similar weapons in the future. By spring 2013, as intelligence reports emerged of Assad’s forces using CW, the main question facing London and Washington was whether Assad could be held accountable (Rhodes, 2018, p.224). In July 2012 in a speech before the Veterans of Foreign Wars and during a press

conference the following month, Obama made two important declarations about Assad: that he would "be held accountable by the international community and the US" (Obama, 2012a) and that the US position about using military force would change if "a whole bunch of chemical weapons were moving around or being utilised" (Obama, 2012b).

Punishing Assad was not simply a matter of justice, Western powers now looked to reinforce the international norm on the usage of CW to maintain the rules-based world order. Humanitarian concerns aside, the Obama administration was arguably most concerned with preserving the international norm against the use of CW, so much so that Obama was willing to consider using force, as reflected by his requests to military leaders to draw up plans for strikes on September 2, 2013 (Khatib et al., 2017). London shared this concern as Cameron argued intervention was necessary to "deter and to degrade the future use" of CW (Cameron, 2013). Writing about the August 2013 vote in his memoir, Cameron reflected that the issue on the table was not whether to keep UK out of another Middle Eastern conflict, but "whether to respond to…a war crime that Britain had agreed, indeed led the way on, outlawing back in 1925. This was about upholding the rules-based international order" (Cameron, 2019, p.464). In short, London framed intervention as the "legal, proportionate and focused response" (HC Deb 29 August 2013, c.1439) to upholding global norms in the face of serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Although the US and UK both shared the view that Assad could not use CW with impunity (Huffington Post, 2013), Obama and Cameron took different approaches about how to enforce this norm. London was vocal that more needed to be done, arguing that "the moral case for humanitarian intervention was enough to circumvent" a UNSC resolution which had proved impossible to secure thanks to Sino-Russian opposition (Fiddes, 2020, p.176). By contrast, Obama's decision against using force left Assad unaccountable for his actions, which some commentators argued led to the erosion of the

global non-proliferation norm (Rimland, 2014). This divergence within the Obama-Cameron relationship will be discussed later in this chapter.

### 6.52 Poodle no more

Domestic circumstances, specifically the Parliamentary vote of 285-272 against the launch of military strikes on August 29, deprived Cameron of the opportunity to influence the Obama White House about Syria, making it impossible for the UK to perform its role as America's 'faithful ally'. The expectation that Parliament would exercise a greater voice in planning future military action signalled a major shift in Britain's foreign policy (Honeyman, 2015, pp.57-58). Although Cameron could have still authorised military action via the 'royal prerogative' (Mayall, 2020, p.284), as Honeyman has noted, "a new norm had been created, requiring Prime Ministers to gain Parliamentary assent for military action" (2015, p.58). Moreover, the 2013 vote revealed another truth about British interventionism: the calculus for the use of force for humanitarian intervention, which had previously characterised British policy throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, had changed. For Andrea Betti, the vote showed that Parliament was "less open to give governments blank cheques in the management" of humanitarian operations (2020, p.140). As a result of domestic political pressures and the context of previous interventions in CA + MENA, the UK's role conception as the 'opportunist-interventionist' power had evolved.

Syria demonstrated that Britain would no longer act as 'America's poodle'; this was a different context in which London and Washington found themselves compared to previous interventions in the MENA. Certainly, the US could still rely on British political support, but "it could no longer assume that the UK would join every US-led military intervention" (Strong, 2015a, p.1138). The knee-jerk reaction to stand 'shoulder to

shoulder' as comrades in arms, which had defined US-UK military relations throughout Afghanistan, Iraq and, to a lesser extent Libya, did not transpire in Syria. The UK's decision not to provide military support was a direct consequence of a break in tradition of how the British government operated - for the first time since 1782 a British Prime Minister had lost a vote on using military force (Osborn, 2013; Kaarbo and Kenealy, 2014; Strong, 2015b). Ironically, the last time this occurred was during Lord North's government when Parliament conceded US independence by voting against further miliary action to quell the colonial insurrection (Osborn, 2013).

In addition to fears of mission creep, the main argument against military intervention, was the belief that Cameron was "rushing to support the US", which further perpetuated the 'Syria as Iraq' narrative amongst MPs opposed to intervention (Ralph, Holland and Zhekova, 2017, p.895). As Leader of the Labour Party and Leader of the Opposition, Ed Miliband, argued before the House of Commons: "Being an ally of the United States and having a special relationship…cannot simply be about doing what the American president says he wants you to do" (Castle and Erlanger, 2013). Contrary to his predecessors Blair and Brown, Miliband did not view joining the US-led operation in Syria as serving the British national interest. Despite Cameron's assurance that British actions would not be determined by Washington, but by the UK Government and votes in the House of Commons (HC Deb 29 August 2013, c.1433), Parliament still denied the Cameron government the opportunity to support its principal ally in launching airstrikes. As Sir Peter Westmacott, UK Ambassador to Washington from 2012 to 2016, opined, Syria was a "watershed moment"[245] in AAR; the vote suggested that there would be "less automaticity to the defence and military aspects of the relationship than there had been

[245] Interview with Sir Peter Westmacott, Zoom, 3 May 2022.

there prior to the vote".[246] Some like Gaskarth (2016) highlighted the negative consequences of such a shift, noting the impact on AAR and whether the US could still rely on the special relationship during times of conflict. Britain's reputation as America's closest ally had been called into question, and with it, the future of the special relationship.

In sum, Parliament's vote against British military action in Syria revealed the limitations of British smart power. Syria showed that British policy would no longer follow Washington's agenda and the UK's national identity as an 'opportunist-interventionist' power had been exhausted. The realisation that not every humanitarian crisis demanded a British military response, another post-Iraq lesson, had permeated the public's mood over Syria. Moreover, Parliament's veto of military action highlighted Britain's shift away from its role as the US' 'faithful ally' and towards a "supportive but more independent stance" (Strong, 2015a, p.1138). As such, British foreign policy had become more democratic and increasingly sceptical of following the US into war zones overseas, which made the prospect of the UK joining a US military operation in Syria less likely.

### 6.6 Utilising the 'special relationship'

A top priority for Cameron in Syria was to piggyback off US power by urging Obama to launch a military operation to punish and to deter Assad. Obama initially made efforts to deploy non-military measures against Assad, particularly economic sanctions combined with rhetorical condemnation (Gates, 2020, p.303); however, the administration remained averse to the use of military force. Except for the prospect of an impending humanitarian catastrophe, none of the conditions that had legitimised using force in Libya - UNSC approval, backing from the Arab League, a willing coalition of allies - existed in

[246] Ibid.

Syria. Thus, the chances of the US deploying military force against Assad were zero (ibid.). However, as Cameron reflected in his memoir, Syria was not Libya and "to have America leading from behind was not an option" for the West (2019, p.451). Cameron's varied appeals to Obama about military force were "rebuffed" however, such that, by Autumn 2012, the British Prime Minister told his advisers that "he couldn't see the president moving forward" on the issue of force (2019, p.141). Cameron's described Washington's vacillation about using force during the first year of the war as his "biggest frustration" (2019, p.453).

Not only was Cameron unable to convince Obama to use force post-Ghouta, but, as previously mentioned, Obama remained unconvinced about using even limited military action to support the opposition (Kerry, 2018, p.551). The UK sought to arm the opposition by lifting the EU arms embargo on Syria in November 2012, however, initially Washington, "the most cautious of everyone…remained unconvinced" (Fiddes, 2020, p.173). Many regional allies perceived the US strategy in Syria as "feckless" as a result (ibid., p.174), with the UK pressing the US to arm the opposition as reports of CW usage began to emerge. In June 2013, the US eventually approved the provision of lethal aid to the rebels, but only after the UK and France managed to negotiate the lifting of the embargo two months before (ibid., p.174), the first time during the conflict when Western states armed the opposition (Chaffin, 2013). By the time Washington had reversed its position on sending weapons to the opposition, however, it was too late as the 'moderate' rebel groups were too weak and disorganised to overpower Assad's forces (Phillips, 2022, p.141). London welcomed Washington's change of heart, but it was apparent that there was a lack of US leadership and direction in Syria, which in turn, began to undermine its credibility. As Alistair Burt, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from 2010 to 2013 reflected, Syria was "a real departure from the

typical American behaviour in the region"[247] where the US had previously intervened in the region for decades.

If Libya had taught Obama anything, a conflict which he regarded as "the worst mistake of his presidency" (Rhodan, 2016), it was that the US ought to avoid intervention in the MENA (Goldberg, 2016, p.270). Libya had confirmed Obama's belief about intervention as the US had been dragged into a messy conflict without a suitable post-war plan and was forced to 'lead from behind' when its allies proved unable to deliver. Obama did not want to make the same mistake in Syria: 'once bitten, twice shy'. As such, the US sought to keep Syria at arm's length by playing a "behind the scenes" role in the crisis (Gates, 2020, p.304). However, this approach was short-lived and evolved as a result of two developments during the conflict: Assad's use of chemical weapons, which changed the Obama administration's calculus to use force, and the US-Russian joint initiative to remove CW in Syria. Initially, US policy in Syria vacillated and lacked a coherent strategy, with the responsibility of leading the Western international community's response to Assad, falling to the British (Phillips, 2022, p.140). Roles were reversed however in August 2013 post-Ghouta. In a phone call two days after the attack, Obama rang Cameron asking for Britain's support as the US prepared to launch military strikes within the next 36 to 48 hours (Oliver and Seldon, 2022). As one former British ambassador to the US stated, rather than consult meaningfully with its allies, Washington decided how it was going to act and then put the question to London, "Are you with us?"[248] The crossing of Obama's red line meant the US could no longer afford to play a 'behind the scenes' role. However, Cameron's defeat in Parliament on August 29, 2013, which blocked UK

[247] Interview with Alistair Burt, Lancaster, 29 June 2022.
[248] Interview with Sir Peter Westmacott, Zoom, 3 May 2022.

involvement in punitive military action, revealed that the US could not depend on its closest ally to provide military support.

As a result, the US stepped up politically and exerted more assertive diplomatic leadership as it pursued a solution, alongside Russia, to negotiate a ceasefire with the Assad regime and to disarm Syria of its CW. In his memoir, Cameron reflected how in Spring 2013, a couple months before the parliamentary vote, US officials, specifically John Kerry "rushed to see Putin in Moscow a couple of days before us" to discuss a solution to end hostilities in Syria and to broker a transition deal; a move that Cameron called "unhelpful" (2019, p.454). Over the course of the conflict that this thesis examines, the UK went from leading the Western international community's diplomatic response to playing a supporting role to American plans for missile strikes to sitting on the side-lines. As John Casson, Cameron's Foreign Affairs Private Secretary from 2010 to 2014, argued, Cameron's failure to garner parliamentary support in August 2013 had proved that Britain was not "ready to lead on the world stage as the Americans were."[249] While the UK may have sought to exercise a greater leadership role, Syria illustrated that Britain's political latitude for intervention in CA + MENA was now very narrow. Thus, as the US stepped up from its 'behind the scenes' role, the UK was "left behind".[250]

## 6.7 The politics of personal relations

Despite Britain and America's "alignment on so many issues" and the "genuine friendship" between Cameron and Obama, according to the British Prime Minister "on Syria, our views were very different" (Cameron, 2019, p.458). If the West's "failure in the Balkans and in Rwanda" had lit a fire under Cameron to intervene in Syria, it was the

[249] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.
[250] Ibid.

“mistakes of Iraq” that had contributed to Obama’s reluctance to take decisive action (ibid.). These tragedies, in particular, informed both Cameron and Obama’s attitudes about intervention. Although London and Washington agreed that Assad’s actions “merited a serious response” (Chulov and Helm, 2013), they diverged on what that response should look like. This put strain on the Obama-Cameron relationship.

**6.71 Still special?**

As William Hague reiterated to John Kerry, Cameron sought “to act in lockstep” with Washington in Syria (Kerry, 2018, p.531), thus reinforcing Britain’s role as America’s ‘faithful ally’ and “trusted and valued friend”.[251] This was a continuation of the Cameron government’s commitment to “maintaining the Anglo-American relationship” (Honeyman, 2015, p.53). As such, when Obama called Cameron asking for military support “within the next 36 hours” for the sake of the special relationship, Cameron felt that he could not be the “first conservative Prime Minister to say no when the American President comes calling” (Oliver and Seldon, 2022). Cameron had clearly forgotten the lessons of US-UK relations when the alliance had survived previous episodes of political tension, such as Britain’s refusal to send troops to Vietnam or to allow British bases to be used to support US resupply flights to Israel during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Despite this, the alliance had survived amid the share of strategic concerns engendered by the Cold War.

While Obama valued British support, Washington’s behaviour towards London did not reflect ‘business as usual’ in the relationship, thus raising questions about the ‘specialness’ of the alliance. As in Libya, AAR at the elite level were cooler over Syria. According to Sir Nigel Sheinwald, former UK Ambassador to the US from 2007- 2012,

[251] Interview with British diplomat and former member of the UK National Security Council, London, 8 December 2022, name anonymised to protect individual’s identity.

communications and contact between London and Washington had been "frequent and intense" between Blair and Bush, as with previous US and UK governments during wartime.[252] The "drumbeat of contact" at the top political level that was mirrored by contacts all the way through the civilian and military systems "had abated…by the time Cameron came to power."[253] Equally, Obama was described as "not as committed to personal connections to his allied fellow leaders in the way Bush and Blair had been".[254]

Moreover, the White House did not consult with No 10, especially in the days leading up to the proposed air strikes. As Sir Peter Westmacott reflected: "There was less of an instinctive consultation of the allies while the NSC talked to itself, worked out what American policy was going to be and then the allies would be informed."[255] Thus, in the days following the Ghouta attack, London received little information about US thinking as the White House "weighed its options" (Seldon and Snowden, 2015, p.332). In fact, Cameron was forced to wait three days for a response to his request for a phone conversation with Obama on August 24 (Ashton, 2022, p.364). The Prime Minister was on holiday in Cornwall when Obama finally called requesting British support for a US-led operation that was already "ready to go" (Bowen and Moran, 2020). As in previous interventions and as several MPs reminded Cameron during the August 29 debate in the House of Commons, the US was once again driving the military timetable (HC Deb 29 August 2013, c.1461).

But, while British support was valuable to Washington, the US had nurtured other 'special' relationships with European allies over Syria, notably with Germany and France. This was reflected by Obama's phone call to German Chancellor Angela Merkel

[252] Interview with Sir Nigel Sheinwald, London, 21 July 2022.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Interview with Sir Peter Westmacott, Zoom, 3 May 2022.

requesting military support after the CW attack on Ghouta. According to Rhodes, there was “no foreign leader he [Obama] admired more” than Merkel; the fact that she was his second phone call after Ghouta, following his call to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, is revealing. Following Cameron’s disastrous defeat in Parliament, Obama and French President, Francois Hollande, agreed to intervene in Syria, without the UK (Putin vs the West, 2022). However, despite Obama’s apparent willingness to go ahead with air strikes the UK parliamentary vote had a sobering effect on the President’s decision-making. Despite the lack of a close personal rapport between Obama and Cameron years, what happened in London still mattered in Washington, underlining the special weight and value that the US placed on the British voice.

### 6.72 Blurred lines, red lines

Another point of tension was about the use of punitive military action following the CW attack in the Ghouta suburb of Damascus. On August 21, 2013, hundreds of civilians, including children were killed by the nerve agent sarin used in a rocket attack by Assad’s forces in Ghouta. Cameron’s own ‘red line’ had also been crossed, both personally and politically. As the historian Nigel Ashton notes, the tragic images and video content emerging from Ghouta, specifically those depicting gasping young children, had “struck a personal note” with Cameron who had lost his own son, Ivan, to a rare degenerative condition, shortly after becoming prime minister (2022, p.364). As Ashton argued, “the role of raw emotion in conditioning reactions should never be underestimated” as it certainly played a part in the creation of Cameron’s own red line (ibid.). The Ghouta attack was exactly the event that could drag Washington, as well as the British public, into supporting more proactive measures in Syria. As Cameron reflected, he trusted Obama “100 per cent” that if his red line was crossed, then the US would act (2019, p.453).

Initially, Washington and London were aligned in their response: a military strike was now on the table. The Ghouta attack was a flagrant breach of global weapons norms surrounding the use of Chemical weapons and Obama's red line that it could no longer be ignored. US deterrent credibility was also on the line if it failed to follow through and take action (Goldberg, 2016, p.248). In the days following Ghouta, the US planned a 'punish and deter' attack within 36 hours and wanted the UK to play a role despite only having limited military capabilities in theatre (Cameron, 2019, p.460). Chuck Hagel, who served as US Secretary of Defence from 2013 to 2015, prepared military assets to "fulfil and comply with whatever option the president wishes to take", telling members of the press the US armed forces in the region "were ready to go" (Bowen and Moran, 2020). By August 26, US Navy warships were in position to attack Syria (Cameron, 2019, p.461).

Just as it seemed that the stage was set, Washington hesitated. This time, it was over UN inspectors who had arrived at Damascus on August 18 to investigate alleged use of CW (Warrick, 2021). According to Joby Warrick, author of *Red Line*, the UN teams, led by CW expert and academic Ake Sellstrom, encountered difficulties from the Assad regime who initially prevented the team from carrying out inspections. At the same time, President Obama was pressuring UN Secretary General Ban-ki Moon to withdraw Sellstrom's team "at once" so that the US could launch strikes (Morning Edition, 2021). In her memoir, former US ambassador to the UN from 2013 to 2017, Samantha Power, revealed that the presence of UN weapons inspectors on the ground delayed the US military strike that Obama had planned to launch on the night of August 25. The UN team in Damascus became "an obsessive matter for the president himself" (ibid.) so much so that over the next five days, Obama repeatedly asked Power and Kerry whether Ban Ki-Moon had withdrawn the UN team so that he could order the strikes. Still, the inspectors remained in Damascus, which reportedly left Obama "seething with frustration" (Power,

2019, p.373). As time elapsed, the momentum within Washington and London to deploy force began to fade.

Although Assad had defiled global norms by using CW, ultimately neither the US nor the UK could now intervene militarily. As discussed, Cameron's defeat in Parliament left Obama in the precarious position, without a UN mandate or support of a close ally, to pursue unilateral military action against Assad. On the morning of Obama's statement on US military strikes, he announced that he would seek authorisation from Congress, although as noted, this vote never occurred. Although the President had ordered the preparation of military options, (Gates, 2020, p.307), Obama chose to "solve Syria with diplomacy"[256] by working with Russia to address the threat of Assad's CW stockpiles.

Throughout the conflict, the US and Russia had been in parallel talks, although Russian interference was largely opportunistic. Moscow saw Syria as an opportunity to change the geopolitical map, and some scholars argued this paved the way for Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Morozov, 2022). Moscow's support of Assad was rooted in its long-standing relationship since the 1950s, which was further cemented in 1971 following the coup d'état of Hafiz al Assad (Gaub and Popescu, 2013, p.1). The relationship, driven primarily by Syria's need for allies and weapons, strengthened when the Soviet Union lost Egypt, its primary Arab ally in 1976 in the aftermath of the October 1973 war (ibid.). The partnership gained further traction after both President Vladimir Putin and President Bashar al Assad took office in 2000 (ibid., p.2). Russia's military base in the port of Tartus, which served as a critical asset for Russian operations in the Mediterranean, had become "the only Russian military outpost outside of the post-Soviet space" after Putin closed bases in Vietnam and Cuba (ibid.). As such, the Anglo-American

[256] Interview with Sir Peter Westmacott, Zoom, 3 May 2022.

involvement in Syrian affairs following the Arab Uprisings in 2011 was seen by Moscow as "an illegitimate violation of state sovereignty" of Russia's only ally in the region (Morozov, 2022, p.32). Factoring in these geopolitical considerations as well as the need to secure its own interests in the region, Moscow placed high importance on negotiating a CW deal between Damascus and Washington.

On September 10, 2013, Obama announced that the US would pursue the US-Russia initiative (Rhodes, 2018, p.240). US Secretary of State, John Kerry, worked alongside his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, to produce a joint agreement whereby the US could leverage Russia's long-standing relationship with Syria to convince Assad to permit the entry of UN weapons inspectors who had authorisation to destroy Syrian CW stockpiles (Kerry, 2018, p.538). This suited Washington as Assad would surrender his CW without committing US military resources, and therefore reduce the likelihood of the US becoming entangled in another Middle Eastern conflict. Equally, the joint agreement also suited Russian interests as Moscow sought to preserve the survival of the Assad regime and to increase its own presence in Syria and the region more widely. As a result of these negotiations, the US Congressional vote, which Obama had originally called following Cameron's defeat in Parliament, never took place. Instead, 1300 tons of chemical weapons were removed from Syria and destroyed (Kerry, 2018, p.541). Throughout, the UK, who had sought to lead the international community's response to punish Assad, was kept out of this diplomatic process.

Obama had successfully rebuffed calls for launching military action in Syria. Caught in between fulfilling America's role of global policeman and protecting US national interests, Obama's policy was ultimately guided by realist calculations as he did not believe in sacrificing American blood and treasure to prevent humanitarian disasters that did not pose a direct security threat to the US (Goldberg, 2016, pp.245-246). As

Rhodes recounted during a conversation with the president, Obama was "wrestling with something more fundamental about America, our willingness to take on another war, a war whose primary justification would be humanitarian, a war likely to end badly" (2018, p.239). Obama, like the British public and parliament, feared an "Iraq-style slippery slope" in Syria (Cameron, 2019, p.459); and although punishing Assad and toppling the regime may have aligned with America's traditional role of world policeman, Obama sought to carve a new path for the US, by disentangling it from protracted, overseas conflicts.

In short, "there was no Benghazi to be saved" in Syria (Rhodes, 2016, p.157). Although Obama had stated that CW was "the only thing that would prompt American action" (Cameron, 2019, p.458), intervention in Syria was not in America's national interest. As Goldberg has argued, Obama always questioned the use of military force, believing that only certain events such as global terrorism or a threat against Israel warranted its use (2016, pp.247-248), or if "US national security was directly affected" (Gerges, 2013, p.308). This was demonstrated by the US and UK's return to Syria and Iraq one year later to launch a series of joint airstrikes against ISIL (Ministry of Defence, 2021) which was deemed a national security threat to the West and its regional allies.

Assad was successful "in pushing the President to a place he never thought he would have to go" (ibid., p.248). Having previously used the liberal language of multilateral diplomacy and humanitarianism, Obama "was faced with a hard-headed geopolitical situation" where the political cover he originally sought, both from the UK and his own Congress, did not materialise (Fiddes, 2020, p.186). As Stephen Walt has argued, the US had "little interest in getting bogged down in Syria" and not even the use of CW could alter that reality (ibid.). Despite Assad's brutality and violation of international norms, the Obama administration, albeit divided over intervention as in Libya, placed national interests above liberal ideals and focused more on the "broader geopolitical

considerations" (Guiora, 2011, p.267). In short, Syria was an example of the US reasserting realism in its foreign policy.

Obama's decision to suspend military strikes caused reverberations at home and abroad. In Washington, neither Chuck Hagel nor John Kerry, both advocates of military strikes, were in the Oval Office when Obama informed his team of his change of plan. Kerry, in particular, would not learn about the change until later that evening, allegedly telling a friend: "I just got fucked over!" (Goldberg, 2016, p.253). Some within the White House were concerned about the implications of the US' lack of follow through. Susan Rice, Obama's national security adviser, feared that Obama's U-turn would cause "serious and lasting damage" to US credibility (ibid., p.251). Robert Gates, US Secretary of Defence, had warned Obama to "stay away from ultimatums and red lines" stating during an interview, "The biggest mistake was declaring the red line and then not enforcing it".[257] As Gates reflected, "I told him [Obama] 'Once you cock that pistol, you have to be willing to fire it.'"[258] Obama proved he was unwilling to pull the trigger.

On the one hand, the US' use of diplomacy to successfully disarm Assad of his CW (Rhodes, 2018, p.240) without the use of force can be viewed as an achievement. There is, nonetheless, also the issue of the impact of US inaction on the perception of US power. As UK Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond remarked during a BBC documentary, "Obama's red line had been ignored and action wasn't taken. Putin took a lesson from that" (Putin vs the West, 2022). Commentators have remarked that this diplomatic initiative, albeit successful in disarming a rogue regime of thousands of tons of CW, had sent the signal to Assad that the international community would not hold dictators accountable for their use of WMD. Regardless of the veracity of this argument, used by interventionists in both No

[257] Interview with Secretary Robert Gates, Zoom, 7 July 2022.
[258] Ibid.

10 and the White House, London and Washington avoided involvement in another conflict in the MENA region. However, the war continued to ravage Syria for another decade, with some reports estimating as many as 606,000 people killed and millions displaced between March 2011 and June 2021 when peace talks for a new constitution stalled (SOHR, 2020).

However, London was "shocked" by Obama's U-turn (Cameron, 2019, p.466). As Cameron wrote in his memoir, this was the moment when "an American president had lost his? nerve" (ibid.). But having lost a parliamentary vote himself, Cameron could hardly justify "pointing the finger of blame at Obama" (Ashton, 2022, p.366). The US suspension of military action in Syria divided Obama and Cameron. As Obama revealed in a 2016 interview, choosing to suspend missile strikes against Assad, and pursue a diplomatic approach alongside Russia instead, was the decision of which he was "very proud" (Levitz, 2016). By contrast, Cameron has stated that the US President's handling of the Syrian crisis was the thing he regretted the most about Obama's presidency (Cameron, 2019, p.466). Clearly, the special relationship was fractious.

**6.8 Conclusion: Evidence of British influence?**

Smart power, as a framework to understand US-UK relations, does have limitations as ultimately Britain was unable to influence the US agenda in Syria. The case of Syria exposes the limits of British smart power when there were cooler personal relations at the elite level of the alliance and the legacy of a bitter intervention in Libya being waged on the back of R2P.

There are a number of explanations why Cameron was unsuccessful in achieving his aims in Syria. Cameron's poor understanding of his American counterpart partially explained his mishandling of the crisis. Like many of America's allies in Europe and the Middle East, Cameron was "under the impression that the president would enforce the red

line" (Goldberg, 2016, p.249). A former No 10 official reported that Cameron had sought to "encourage Obama toward more decisive action", when at a joint press conference in May 2013, he stated: "Syria's history is being written in the blood of her people, and it is happening on our watch" (ibid.). As Casson explained, "Cameron saw an opportunity in the use of chemical weapons as an obvious way to drag Obama over his red line...and I think Obama felt a bit 'snookered' by his own ultimatum."[259]

Equally, Cameron misjudged the public mood, or at least the extent to which Iraq still cast a long shadow over British politics. While the British public had not suddenly become pacifist post-Iraq, polling data showed a lack of public support for intervention in Syria. A YouGov poll taken on the morning of the vote showed that support for UK military action was 22 per cent with those opposed at 51 per cent (Jordan, 2013). Shadow Health Secretary, Dianne Abbott, concluded: "The British people have seen this movie, they know how it ends. That is why the public is two to one against bombing Syria" (ibid). Public opposition to British military involvement may also have stemmed from the belief, shared by many MPs, that Syria did not endanger British national interests. This assumption was also reflected in a 2013 IPSOS Mori poll which showed that 31 per cent of respondents thought the British military should intervene when other peoples' freedoms were at risk while 44 per cent thought intervention was justified only when British national interests were under threat (Ricketts, 2021, p.87).

Abigail Watson from the Oxford Research Group attributed Cameron's defeat in Parliament to the government's unconvincing strategy for how British military action would tackle the instability in Syria and the wider region (2018, p.1). There are multiple factors that explain Cameron's "mishandling" of the vote, including: MPs' confusion

[259] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.

about the mandate (Cameron had asked for a vote on the principle of using force but this was not well understood amongst MPs), internal party dynamics and the lack of "tearoom chats" with Conservative backbenchers (ibid., p.4). It was, however, "the spectre of Iraq" that hung over the vote that day (Ricketts, 2021, pp.72-73).

As Watson's research highlights, the Iraq War was mentioned 100 times throughout the debate in the House of Commons (2018, p.2). Leader of the Opposition, Ed Miliband, attacked the government for following a "timetable set elsewhere" (Strong, 2015a, p.1129), thus drawing parallels to what was perceived as Blair's blind following of Bush into Iraq. Moreover, Angus Robertson, then Westminster Spokesperson for the Scottish National Party (SNP) stated: "We cannot ignore the lessons of the calamitous Iraq War" (Watson, 2018, p.2). Although Cameron was not proposing 'boots on the ground' but for a limited air strike to "deter and to degrade Assad's use of CW", there were too many parallels between Iraq and Syria for parliamentarians to draw (Ricketts, 2021, pp.72-73), specifically the use of CW, claims to have "robust intelligence before the UN weapons inspectors" had reported their findings and requesting legal justification for military intervention from the UNSC (Scott, 2016, p.406). As General Sir Simon Mayall, Middle East Adviser to the MOD from 2011 to 2014, argued: "Had we [UK] not gone into Iraq, I think Britain's response to the Arab Spring would have been totally different."[260] Cameron "could not leave Blair's shadow" (Ashton, 2022, p.366), and Blair's legacy of interventionism in Afghanistan and Iraq had "cast a deep shadow over his successors, conditioning the terms of political debate long after he had left office" (ibid., p.369). As such, a main consequence of Cameron's defeat in parliament was Obama's U-turn on his

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[260] Interview with General Sir Simon Mayall, London, 7 December 2022.

own policy in Syria. The UK may have helped persuade the US to cock the pistol, but not enough to pull the trigger.

Additionally, Cameron was also a victim of his partisan politicking, hamstrung by his own party's backbenchers and the Labour party, which, under the leadership of Ed Miliband, had flip-flopped on its support of Cameron's proposal for potential military action in Syria. Cameron initially had support from Labour, although Miliband set a list of conditions to be met by the Cameron government before agreeing to intervention which included securing UN Security Council approval, that military action had to be time-limited and with a specific purpose and scope, and the UK had to make efforts to end the civil war in Syria (HC Deb 29 August 2013, c.1440). Miliband was concerned that the Cameron government's recall of parliament was too hasty as UN inspectors had not been given the time to investigate and report their findings of CW materials (Gaskarth, 2016, p.723). However, on the evening before the debate in the House of Commons, Miliband rang Cameron, reportedly one hour after Cameron's 16:00 deadline (Oliver and Seldon, 2022), to inform Cameron that Labour would be tabling an amendment and would not support the government motion (ibid.). Miliband, who was accused of "playing politics" (Dominiczak, 2013) became the first opposition leader to oppose government plans to use military force since Suez (Osborn, 2013).

Like Cameron, Obama faced multiple domestic pressures that impacted his decision to not use force in Syria. First, the intelligence community suffered a major credibility problem post-Iraq. As Rhodes recounted in his memoir, intelligence reports of Assad using CW were initially difficult to verify; the 'case' that Assad had authorised a CW attack in Ghouta was not a "slam dunk" (2018, p.228). As such, some within the White House, Vice-President Joe Biden and Robert Gates in particular, believed the basis for military action was precarious. The phrase 'slam dunk', made by Jim Clapper, the

Director of National Intelligence under Obama, had been carefully curated by Clapper as he alluded to former CIA director George Tenet's choice of words used back in 2003 to assure President George W. Bush of Saddam's possession of WMD in Iraq (Goldberg, 2016, p.250). In other words, Clapper was unwilling to once again risk endangering the reputation of the US intelligence community to build another case for war in the Middle East (Rhodes, 2018, p.228).

Clearly, there was also a lack of support in Congress and from the American public. Despite the White House' proposal for limited and targeted military action, many in Congress were "worried about giving the president a blank cheque" (Kerry, 2018, p.535) to use force. As Secretary John Kerry put it: "They may have heard the word 'Syria' but all they saw was Iraq" (ibid.). Additionally, American political and military elite have contended that Obama feared the implications of using force on US-Iran relations. As Ambassador John Bolton, who served as US Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security from 2001 to 2005, stated: "Syria was a situation where American military action could well have had an effect on Obama's aspirations vis-a-vis Iran because the Assad regime is propped up by Iran...".[261] Moreover, Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, who served as national security adviser to President Donald Trump from 2017-2018, argued that Obama failed to intervene in Syria because Obama was "placating Iran for the JCPOA."[262]

While it is important to consider these external factors that shaped Obama's decision-making, it was Cameron's failed vote in Parliament that was "the second major factor" that worried the president; the presence of UN inspectors being the first (Goldberg, 2016, p.252). As in Libya, achieving consensus amongst traditional Western allies as a

[261] Interview with Ambassador John Bolton, Zoom, 24 June 2022.
[262] Interview with Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, Zoom, 2 June 2022.

precondition for intervention, was important to Obama. Developments in London had caused Obama to become "increasingly cautious of launching air strikes" (Fiddes, 2020, p.180). "I don't think anybody in Washington saw that coming"[263], remarked Ambassador John Bolton about the UK vote. "I think stomachs in the White House began to get very queasy indeed."[264] As Sir Malcolm Rifkind noted, while "America was not dependent on the UK for a military contribution"[265] in Syria, and while Cameron's shock defeat in Parliament had "weighed on the White House"[266], the British vote had handed Obama, an American president who was reluctant to go to war in the first place, a fig leaf.

On the one hand, the UK vote had destabilised Washington and contributed towards Obama's decision to not use force. However, the case of Syria clearly illustrates the limitations of the exercise of British smart power as ultimately Cameron was unable to shape the US agenda in Syria. His failure to mobilise his political base and to garner support from Parliament was the final straw. Moreover, Parliament's involvement in Syria undermined Britain's ability for it to perform its national roles, namely its humanitarian responsibilities in Syria and its duty to uphold R2P and other global norms. In sum, Syria demonstrates the diminishing returns of smart power within the special relationship.

### 6.81 Reciprocity in the special relationship

This thesis highlights one final observation about US-UK relations during the Syrian conflict: that domestic British politics could influence US policy, as Obama used developments in London to renege on his plan to use military force in Syria. As US Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates, argued: "Here you had a president who didn't want to intervene anyway and was thinking about how he would sell it to Congress. And then all

[263] Interview with Ambassador John Bolton, Zoom, 24 June 2022.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Interview with Sir Malcom Rifkind, Zoom, 19 July 2022.
[266] Interview with Alistair Burt, Lancaster, 29 June 2022.

of a sudden, British Parliament, our closest ally, says 'No'…it had a big impact…not just on Obama, but on Congress as well."[267] Although the UK vote happened within the context where Obama was already "vacillating on the use of military power"[268], it nonetheless gave the Obama administration a "get out of jail free card" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2014) to pursue the policy it perceived as most compatible with American interests, which in this case, was pursuing a joint initiative alongside Russia to destroy Syria's CW stockpiles and to deter Assad from using CW in the future. All this without resorting to using American military force. While Cameron was unable to influence Obama to act unilaterally in Syria (Phillips, 2022, p.141), the UK, by default, did influence US policy. The UK vote did not just veto British intervention abroad, but it had also stymied US military action.

This underscored the symbiosis and reciprocity of the special relationship; specifically, the notion that what happened in London mattered in Washington. Despite Britain's 'junior' status within the alliance, the US regarded its relationship with the UK as special to the extent that it provided the US political cover to intervene in Syria.[269] As one senior British diplomat explained, in addition to practical military and political assistance, Washington saw London as the "voice of a friend"[270]. Moreover, Syria illustrated how "policy will often be enhanced or pursued if they have their allies and partners on board."[271] This was reflected by Obama's "last minute" decision to seek Congressional approval to authorise the use of force (Kerry, 2018, p.533). According to Kerry, after Cameron's defeat, Obama felt he could not justify bypassing Congress (ibid., p.534). Decisions in London changed the dynamic within the relationship, and Obama gave

[267] Interview with Secretary Robert Gates, Zoom, 7 July 2022.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Interview with Ambassador John Bolton, Zoom, 24 June 2022.
[270] Interview with British diplomat and former member of the UK National Security Council, London, 8 December 2022, name anonymised to protect individual's identity.
[271] Interview with British diplomat and former member of the UK National Security Council, London, 8 December 2022, name anonymised to protect individual's identity.

Congress the same role as the House of Commons. Obama's decision to mirror Cameron in the politics of intervention highlighted that the special relationship was truly "never in doubt" (Strong, 2015b, p.19). As Sir Peter Westmacott highlighted, the vote "changed the politics" of intervention as it "changed the ability of both countries to intervene militarily abroad without first securing parliamentary or Congressional approval."[272] Moreover, this reveals the limits of smart power as the Commons vote ultimately prevented the UK from fulfilling its role expectation within the special relationship.

AAR may not have suffered long-term damage by UK Parliament's refusal to sanction UK military action in Syria alongside the US, but questions about Britain's reliability were certainly raised. Despite the Cameron government's inability to achieve its principal goals, mainly to operate alongside the US in Syria, the special relationship endured. However there has been considerable debate about the implications of Parliament's vote for US-UK relations. In the moments following the August 29 vote, British newspapers speculated about the future of ties between Washington and London. From the front page of *The Sun*, which ran a "death notice for the special relationship" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2014) to *The Financial Times* stating that the relationship "cannot but suffer" (ibid.), many in the UK believed this was a watershed moment for US-UK relations. BBC North America's editor, Mark Mardell, stated "if Britain can't deliver, it will leave some in the US asking, 'what's so special?' about the relationship with the UK" (Mardell, 2013). British politicians also expressed their concern. UK Chancellor, George Osborne remarked that "it would have been better from the point of view of the special relationship" if Britain had participated in military action alongside the US (Osborn, 2013), and Defence Secretary, Phillip Hammond,

[272] Interview with Sir Peter Westmacott, Zoom, 3 May 2022.

predicted that US-UK relations would be "damaged" as a result of the vote (The Economist, 2013).

Certainly, London's reaction could be regarded as hyperbole, but a similar reaction was shared by some in Washington. A *Washington Post* article called the Syria vote "the biggest rupture in the US-British 'special relationship' since the 1982 Falklands war" (Faiola, 2013), while Roger Cohen from *the New York Times* argued the vote left the alliance "in search of meaning" (Cohen, 2013). Despite the fear of British loss of influence in Washington, several politicians from both sides of the Atlantic snuffed out rumours of a transatlantic rift. While the UK Foreign Affairs Committee had reported "some difficulty for US-UK diplomacy" at the UN in New York as both powers sought to negotiate a new Security Council resolution authorising military force (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2014), despite the UK no longer participating, Foreign Office officials, such as Sir Nigel Sheinwald, argued that London and Washington were "in the same boat" (ibid.) when it came to reservations about deploying military action.

As Cameron recorded in his memoir, Obama "couldn't have been more generous" about the UK's inability to join the US in Syria (2019, p.466). While Obama publicly admitted that the House of Commons vote had been "a bump in the road and nothing more" he claimed that America's relationship with Britain was still special (ibid.). One senior British diplomat suggested, however, that although Obama was certainly "politically sympathetic", he was "nonetheless angry" that the outcome had essentially come down to political wrangling over a parliamentary motion.[273] John Kerry claimed, nonetheless, that the bond between the US and the UK was "bigger than one vote or one moment in history" and that the two countries "remained true friends despite the UK ruling

[273] Interview with British diplomat, Zoom, 5 December 2022, name anonymised to protect individual's identity.

out military involvement" (BBC, 2013). Moreover, William Hague reiterated that the UK and US remained "closely aligned" on Syria (ibid.). Nevertheless, according to Rhodes, the flurry of emails from Cameron's aides indicated that London worried about the "damage to Britain's role in the world" (Rhodes, 2018, p.234). John Casson shed light on this during an interview:

> I think British foreign policy came to an end for ten years that week…Cameron thought he would save the Syrian people. When you're a county with global influence, you should try and use that power for good…so we felt gutted that we were going to be left behind.[274]

While the British vote put the US in a difficult position and had even "angered" its French ally,[275] some commentators have insisted that the House of Commons vote did not endanger Britain's relationship with the US (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2014). Instead, it has been argued that the vote illustrated a new phase in the relationship - that London could diverge from American policy without risking its privileged position in Washington. Steve Marsh and John Baylis (2006) have branded this phenomenon, the ability of the special relationship to maintain its institutional resilience despite enduring a series of transatlantic rifts, as the "Lazarus-like" quality of the alliance. Still, some like Strong argued that the British vote demonstrated inconsistent foreign policy behaviour, which made the UK a "less reliable ally" to the US. Moreover, as Lord Ricketts has noted, the vote "created uncertainty in the relationship which didn't exist before" (2021, p.187).

In sum, while the special relationship did not suffer irreversible damage, Syria demonstrated a loss of British influence within the alliance. Cameron's inability to garner parliamentary support for the use of military force in Syria reflected inconsistent foreign policy behaviour, painting the UK as an unreliable ally.

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[274] Interview with John Casson, Zoom, 10 May 2022.
[275] Interview with Lord Peter Ricketts, Zoom, 23 June 2022.

In Autumn 2014, less than a year after the Ghouta attack, the US, along with the UK and European allies, responded to the emergence of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria with air strikes without authorisation from the UNSC or US Congressional approval. Any transatlantic drift caused by the 'red lines' debacle in 2013 was pushed to one side by strategic interest that London and Washington shared in countering the threat by ISIL. The contrast between the US-UK response in Syria in 2013 and 2014 illustrates a crucial aspect of Anglo-American intervention in the region post-9/11: -national self-interest, not special relations or R2P norms, ultimately drove intervention.[276] The case of the 2013 Syrian conflict demonstrates Britain's failure to exercise smart power as both the opportunity and context remained beyond Cameron's ability to control. London failed to fulfil its self-appointed role as the Greece to Washington's Rome.

[276] Interview with General Sir John McColl, iPhone, 4 April 2022.

# Chapter 7. Conclusion

*“American power affects the world fundamentally…Stand aside or engage, it never fails to affect.”* (Tony Blair, 2002)

## 7.1 Introduction

During the 2003 Iraq War, Colonel J.K. Tanner, an *aide de camp* to the British Chief of Staff, claimed that despite the UK’s “so-called ‘special relationship’” with the US, the British “were treated no differently than Poland” (Kettle, 2018, p.186). Tanner’s account reflected the “worst fear of British Atlanticists” - that the US regarded its British partner no differently from other allies (Porter, 2010, p.273). This notion of British ‘specialness’ within the context of the Anglo-American relationship, specifically the UK’s ability to shape US policy in CA + MENA post-9/11, has been the subject of this thesis. This thesis addressed the following core research question: *how did the UK influence US intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria between 2001-2013?* In doing so, it also explored the following sub-questions:

1. Was British intervention complementarian?
2. To what extent were regional contexts a factor in the UK’s efforts to influence US intervention in CA + MENA post-9/11?
3. How did the UK utilise its perception of the ‘special relationship’ with the US to advance its interests in the CA + MENA?
4. What role did the politics of personal relations play in the exercise of British power within the alliance?

To answer these questions, this thesis gathered and analysed data from primary sources including government archives, official documentation and semi-structured interviews, as well as from secondary source materials including press releases, newspaper

articles, journal articles and academic publications. This thesis set out to test the concept of smart power against four cases of Anglo-American intervention in CA + MENA post-9/11 to understand how the UK sought to influence the scope and direction of US policy. As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis analysed the time period leading up to intervention of each conflict; it has not examined the full timeline of each conflict.

**7.2 Contribution to the study of Anglo-American relations and power**

This thesis makes an original contribution to the existing literature on Anglo-American relations in two ways. Firstly, this thesis uses the analytical framework of smart power to reconceptualise the contours of the US-UK 'special' relationship post-9/11, and argues that despite the UK's 'junior' partner status within the alliance, the UK remained a valuable partner to Washington and exercised agency to achieve its national interests in CA + MENA. As the cases of Libya and Syria demonstrate, the US recognised the potential risks to its own interests by not partnering together with London; for example, the Obama administration t joining, albeit reluctantly, Britain's calls for intervention. These findings cannot be explained by taking a purely historical approach as it does not capture the nuance in the debates caused by the shifting contextual demands upon leaders in Washington and London. Thus, smart power proved a more robust framework to conceptualise how the UK s tried to orientate and influence US foreign policy behaviour. In so doing, the thesis provides a new interpretation of the Anglo-America alliance from a British perspective.

Secondly, this thesis applies the concept of smart power in an innovative way to reinterpret and to reimagine the US-UK relationship post-9/11. Building upon the work of Suzanne Nossel and Joseph Nye, this thesis developed the idea of smart power to understand how the UK influenced US policy across four military interventions in CA +

the MENA region. It also incorporates the role of personal relations between leaders in the exercise of smart power, an element that has largely been overlooked in the literature to date. Smart power offers a more nuanced understanding of the US-UK relationship that is not solely about the exercise of hard power, but it emphasises the importance of personal ties and relations between leaders and individual decision-makers, as well as those leaders' national role conceptions of their country's agency in global politics. While the literature has studied the Obama administration's adoption of smart power as a foreign policy approach in the MENA region, no account hitherto explored how the UK has used smart power to achieve its strategic objectives in the region. By applying the framework of smart power to explore the exercise of British influence in CA + MENA, this research has made an original contribution to the body of knowledge on AAR and the study of power.

### 7.3 Key findings

The research on Afghanistan has revealed that the UK was partially successful in its exercise of smart power, particularly in the build-up to intervention. Largely informed by Blair's own conception of the special relationship and Britain's role as America's 'faithful ally', the UK aligned itself closely with the US in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, both in its national grief and its commitment to combat the threat of international terrorism, in the hope that it could influence the scope and direction of intervention in Afghanistan. This thesis has argued that the Blair government achieved partial success to the extent that some of its desired outcomes were realised. No 10 persuaded the White House to pursue a multilateral approach for military intervention in Afghanistan as part of an international response to the threat of terrorism. In particular, the US pursued UN authorisation by gaining agreement for Resolutions 1368 and 1373, which authorised taking "all necessary measures steps to respond…and to combat all forms of terrorism…" (UN Security Council, 2001). Although the US was not granted legal

authorisation under UNSCR 1368 to use military action, it had gained legitimate endorsement to intervene on the grounds of self-defence. Afghanistan also highlights the intrinsic role that personality plays in the exercise of smart power as London's ability to shape the agenda in Washington was largely a result of Blair's style of leadership and his close relationship with President George W. Bush.

Yet, London could not completely determine US decision-making. On the one hand, Blair was able to influence debates in Washington over the importance of including a humanitarian element to intervention in Afghanistan and convinced the Bush administration to see the usefulness of the UN leading the post-conflict reconstruction phase. However, the UK was unable to fully shape US policy preferences around the issue of nation-building as the Bush administration was wary of committing American troops and resources towards post-war stabilisation efforts. In sum, the scope and execution of post-conflict nation-building showed the limitations of Britain's smart power to fully influence the US agenda.

The case of Iraq demonstrates that the UK achieved partial success in its exercise of smart power in the lead up to intervention, although the UK failed to tame American power in the post-war context. Two factors ultimately motivated Blair's decision to take the UK to war in Iraq: firstly, the fear that by not partnering alongside the US, it would endanger the special relationship. It also gave Blair the opportunity to influence US policy "from the inside" as he believed he had accomplished in Afghanistan (Kettle, 2018, p.175). Secondly, like Bush, Blair feared the threat of the nexus between international terrorism and rogue regimes, like Saddam's Iraq. The evidence has shown that Blair had a genuine belief that Saddam posed an existential threat to British national security as well as the global order. British power alone was insufficient to maintain a rules-based international order upturned by the threat of WMD ending up in the hands of rogue regimes. As such,

Blair nurtured a close relationship with Bush, both to maximise British influence on the global stage but also to preserve Britain's long-standing partnership with America, which Blair viewed as playing a key role in the UK's security and defence policy. The UK's readiness to show willing to the US, by standing 'shoulder to shoulder' with its American counterparts in Iraq, resulted in London accumulating high levels of political capital and influence in Washington. However, as the evidence has shown, the UK achieved partial success in shaping the wider US agenda over Iraq thus highlighting the limitations of British smart power.

The degree to which the UK successfully influenced US policy in Iraq has been a topic of considerable debate within Anglo-American literature in which this thesis has sought to contribute additional insights. As the research has highlighted, Blair's pledge of British support has been criticised by commentators as evidence of the Prime Minister's 'poodle-like' subservience to the American President. This however is an incomplete assessment of London's actions and lacks nuance. Conversations with policy elites in both London and Washington, as well as evidence from official documentation, suggested that the UK was successful in re-engaging the US across a series of crises in the Middle East, which included a commitment to producing a roadmap for peace in Israel-Palestine (although the commitment did not amount to a substantial proposal) and influencing Gaddafi to disarm Libya of its WMD in 2003. Moreover, alongside others, like US Secretary of State Colin Powell, Blair was successful in persuading Bush to pursue multilateral action through the UN by seeking two Security Council resolutions.

Despite these British diplomatic victories, however the UK failed to influence the US to disarm Iraq through diplomatic means, as the Bush administration pursued unilateral military action when it failed to secure a second resolution. Moreover, the UK failed to

shape the scope and direction of the war, specifically the military timetable and the planning of 'Phase IV' noncombat operations. Despite Blair's efforts to persuade Bush to delay OIF and to provide UN weapons teams adequate time to complete inspections, divergent approaches to post-war reconstruction prevented the UK from influencing US planning around post-conflict activities. Of particular note, Washington's 'light-touch' approach to intervention in Iraq, and London's failure to influence post-war reconstruction planning, illustrated the limits of British influence. In sum, the case of Iraq demonstrates that London's voice mattered in Washington, but it did not always determine US policy. As revealed in personal correspondence, memoirs and elite interviews, the British voice played a major role in the Bush administration's decision-making. However, Blair's promise of unwavering British support in Iraq meant that London ultimately lost leverage in Washington to secure British objectives in Iraq, and with it, an ability to tame American power.

The case of Libya explores the limits of smart power as a function of protecting the US-UK special relationship rather than using it as a means to exercise influence. Libya revealed that Anglo-American intervention was driven by fear, namely the risks of inaction in the wake of a humanitarian catastrophe, rather than as a means to exercise influence. Compared to the Bush-Blair years, during which the special relationship experienced frequent communications and high levels of synergy at the elite level, the Obama-Cameron relationship experienced increased tension. This dissonance between No 10 and the White House left the alliance under periods of strain characterised by lack of consultation, infrequent communication and diverging views about their own country's role in humanitarian intervention. Despite 'cooler' relations between London and Washington, Cameron recognised that the relationship between the US President and British Prime Minister was crucial to the resilience of the Anglo-American alliance. As such, despite

Cameron's frustrations with Obama's reluctance to engage in Libya, London sought to remain close to Washington to ensure that the intervention was a success, especially as the UK and European allies would rely on US airpower, logistics and intelligence.

While Cameron was able to convince Obama to engage in Libya, albeit reluctantly, on the basis of R2P, the UK struggled to fully influence the full scope and direction of American intervention. To an extent, Obama's conditions for intervention in Libya had been met – European leadership, Arab regional support and a legal mandate from the UNSC – but Washington insisted it would only play a supporting role. Obama pledged US support, but he committed the US to a limited ten-day military operation at which point the leadership of military operations would be transferred to NATO. Nevertheless, the dangers of inaction, combined with the risk of fragmentation within the special relationship, drove Obama to the realisation that the US had more to lose if it decided against joining the British-French intervention in Libya.

This suggests that the UK had more agency within the alliance than previously argued by Anglo-American scholars. Certainly, the US often operated as the dominant partner within the relationship but, as the case of Libya demonstrates, the US also realised that diverging with London over foreign policy in MENA would be detrimental to American interests. This explains how, irrespective of the tensions that existed between Cameron and Obama, the US still exhibited an understanding of British interests and committed to a ten-day operation while the UK acknowledged the critical role of American military power to execute a successful campaign in Libya. Thus, Libya demonstrates the importance of smart power as the fear of endangering the special relationship ultimately influenced both Washington and London to remain on the same page, despite each party's mutual frustrations over the nature and duration of intervention.

Finally, the case of Syria exposes the limits of British smart power when there were cooler personal relations at the elite level of the alliance and the legacy of a bitter intervention in Libya, waged on the back of R2P norms. Despite Cameron's multiple attempts to convince Washington to use force to punish and to deter the Assad regime, the US did not follow through with its plan to launch air strikes and opted for a diplomatic solution instead. Although the outcomes of the international community were achieved via the US-Russia joint agreement, which brought in UN weapons inspectors to oversee the destruction of Assad's CW stockpiles, this objective was achieved through default.

Syria highlights that, as an analytical framework to examine AAR, smart power has its limitations as ultimately London failed to influence the US agenda. Cameron's failure to make the case for force before Parliament impacted Washington, thus illustrating the highly symbiotic and reciprocal nature of the Anglo-American alliance. Syria demonstrated that internal political developments, specifically Cameron's failure to mobilise his political base and to garner support from his own government to join potential US airstrikes, had a destabilising effect on the White House. Put simply, what happened in London mattered in Washington. Again, this underscores the mutual reciprocity within the Anglo-American alliance, and highlights Britain's agency within the special relationship. Parliament's involvement in Syria undermined the Cameron government's ability to achieve its goals in Syria: namely to perform its role as America's 'faithful ally' and to uphold R2P and other global norms. In sum, Syria demonstrates Britain's failure to exercise smart power as both the opportunity and context were deprived from Cameron to influence US policy.

To conclude, the framework of smart power, which incorporates the role of personal relationships and national role conceptions, offers additional insights into the US-UK special relationship which is not just about the pure exercise of hard power. Instead,

smart power emphasises the importance of personal relations between individual leaders alongside how those individual actors in the special relationship pursue their own interests.

Moreover, smart power creates a reciprocity within the alliance such that the role of personality can amplify or degrade the importance of the relationship itself. During the 9/11 wars, Bush and Blair shared a close relationship whereby the Anglo-American alliance was characterised by frequent communications, high levels of interdependence and mutual trust between individual leaders. Therefore, London secured unparalleled access to decision-makers in Washington, although there were clear limitations to British smart power, as this chapter has examined. By contrast, in the cases of Libya and Syria, Cameron and Obama lacked personal chemistry, partly due to the context of previous interventions in the Middle East and their own domestic political pressures. This created a relationship that was, at times, fractious. Still, Cameron and Obama both sought to work in lockstep because they both understood that Britain and America had more to lose had they allowed policy debates to come between them and to undermine the foreign policy interests of their two countries on which they closely collaborated.

This phenomenon is further illustrated by the graph below. Where the special relationship moved away from a shared pursuit of a grand strategy in Afghanistan and Iraq (promoting international security to combat the threat of terrorism and rogue regimes) to preventing a humanitarian crisis in Libya and Syria (upholding R2P norms and managing regional instability), where grand strategic interests were not at stake, personal relations between London and Washington dissipated. This explains the downward arrow to the right of the triangle.

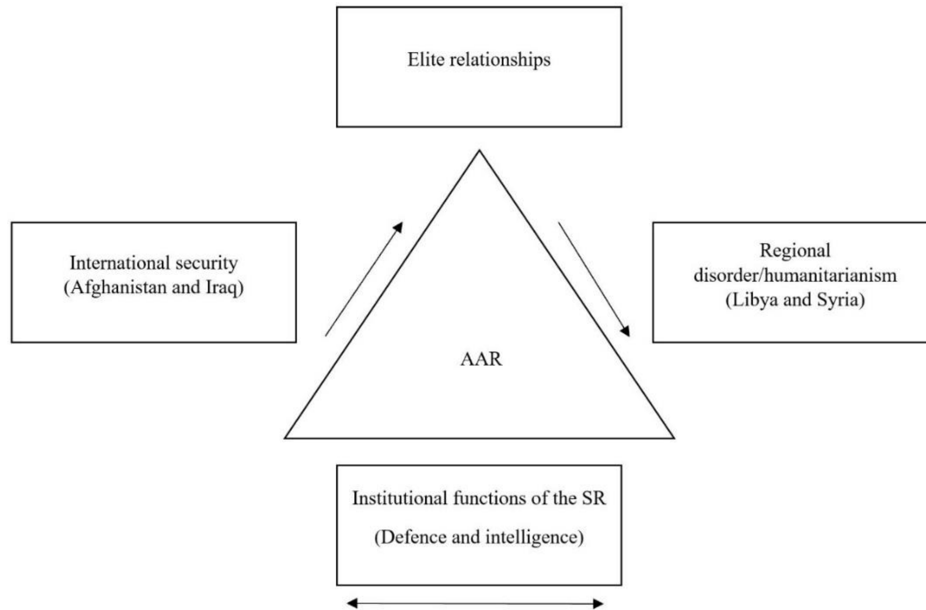


Figure 1.1 Smart power in Anglo-American relations

To conclude, both leaders' mutual understanding of the importance of the US-UK special relationship, and how their personal relationship remained crucial to the endurance of the alliance, meant that relations endured between London and Washington despite increased tensions between No 10 and the White House. For London, the special relationship was viewed as crucial to safeguarding Britain's future, particularly in a world now upturned by the threat of international terrorism and regional instability in the Middle East. For Washington, the special relationship remained 'special' insofar the US regarded the UK as a capable and reliable military ally. The UK's status as America's preferred military partner, which was intensified during the Bush-Blair years, also featured in Obama's calculus as his administration was forced to manage the regional unrest caused by the Arab Uprisings in early 2011. The cases of Libya and Syria reveal that the US recognised the potential risks to American interests if Washington diverged with its key ally in Europe over policy in the MENA region.

This reveals an additional insight into the US-UK special relationship: that the US did not just view its alliance with the UK as political cover to justify its foreign policy

decisions in CA + MENA, but that the alliance gave the UK agency beyond its intelligence capabilities. The latter two cases of Anglo-American intervention underscore how the UK sought to pursue its own national interests in MENA region, partly through cooperation with the US; but equally, and as the case of Syria demonstrates, the UK sought to achieve its own goals in the region irrespective of US preferences. Again, this highlights the UK's agency within the special relationship, and that the UK has not always aligned with American preferences if they risked undermining British interests.

### 7.4 Avenues for future research

This thesis argues that the literature needs a more sophisticated understanding of smart power, how it is applied as well as to understand its limitations as an explanatory framework. Moreover, this construct can be used to examine other case studies in the context of other 'special' relationships between countries, and how the role of personality plays a role in a state's ability to exercise smart power. Additionally, there remains scope for avenues of further research about the dynamics of AAR, both within the context of the four cases studies examined in this thesis and in the study of US-UK relations more broadly. Firstly, an analysis of the special relationship in post-war contexts would be illuminating. For example, a study into the dynamics of US-UK relations during the chaotic withdrawal of Afghanistan in August 2021 would provide additional research on the scope and limitations of British influence, and it would interrogate this notion of British 'specialness' amidst the Biden administration's decision to act unilaterally in Afghanistan. Alleged reports of the White House keeping Britain "in the dark" on evacuation efforts (Datoc, 2021) and the ensuing chaos in Kabul has exposed the fault lines of the Anglo-American alliance. Does the 2021 Afghanistan withdrawal represent just another rift in the alliance, from which both parties will recover over time, as history

on US-UK relations has demonstrated, or does it signify a diminishing of Britain's special partnership with the US? Further research can explore these important questions.

Secondly, the research on Afghanistan and Iraq, in particular, has examined Tony Blair's efforts to position the UK as the 'transatlantic bridge' between the UK and Europe, which placed the UK at the heart of Europe while maintaining its special relationship with the US. However, this study did not explore the changing political circumstances following the 2011 Arab Uprisings, such as the UK's exit from the EU, which has had profound political, defence and economic implications for the US-UK special relationship, especially as Brexit implies new changes in the UK's global posture, particularly its interactions with the US and European allies. Scholars who examine this shift in British foreign policy, especially the UK's tilt towards the Indo-Pacific, in alignment with its American counterparts, could explore the contours of the Anglo-American alliance in a post-Brexit reality.

Relatedly, as the Brexit vote has reflected the profound structural changes that have taken place within the UK, further research could assess how the rise of populism in the UK, as well as in the US, has impacted Anglo-American relations. Considering the recent upsurge of populist developments in the Anglosphere, such as the re-emergence of the 'America First' ideology during the Trump administration and the Johnson government's delivery of populist policies, like Brexit, it would be important to examine the utility of Britain's partnership with the US against the backdrop of these events to explore whether these developments have decreased, increased or simply maintained the utility of the special relationship. In particular, it would be interesting to study how Brexit has impacted the UK's national role conception, specifically its ambitions as 'Global Britain', and whether Brexit has diminished Britain's ability to influence and to shape agendas in the US and Europe. Further research could explore how the Anglo-American alliance has

evolved amidst the current geostrategic context, specifically as America's geostrategic priorities have recalibrated under the Trump and Biden administrations to challenge Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific and to fight Russian aggression in Ukraine.

# Appendices

## Appendix A. Participant Information Sheet

**Project title**: Influence without Leverage? Anglo-American Relations and the Middle East Post-9/11

**Researcher(s)**: Rachel Moreland
**Department:** School of Government and International Affairs
**Contact details**: +447582992700 / rachel.l.moreland@durham.ac.uk

**Supervisor name**: Professor Clive Jones
**Supervisor contact details**: c.a.jones@durham.ac.uk

You are invited to take part in a study that I am conducting as part of my PhD thesis in the School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University.

This study has received ethical approval from the School ethics committee and complies with the guidance of Durham University.

Before you decide whether to agree to take part it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what is involved as a participant. Please do read the following information carefully. Please get in contact if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

The rights and responsibilities of anyone taking part in Durham University research are set out in our 'Participants Charter':
https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/charter/

**What is the purpose of the study?**
The aim of this study is to explore and analyse the special relationship between the United Kingdom and Great Britain by examining four cases of Anglo-American intervention in the Middle East after 9/11: Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Informed by the concept of smart power, this research seeks to explore whether and how whether the UK has influenced US intervention in the Middle East post-9/11.

**Why have I been invited to take part?**
You have been invited because you have been identified as a key actor involved in bi-lateral ties between London and Washington between 2001 – 2017.

**Do I have to take part?**
Your participation is voluntary; you do not have to agree to take part. If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw your participation at any time, without giving a reason.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**
If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview. The interview will not exceed 2 hours. You will be asked a series of questions relating to the subject matter. You can forego questions you do not wish to answer. The

location of the interview will take place at a mutually agreed location, either in the participant's office or in a public setting such as a café. Depending on both parties' preferences, you may be asked to take part in a follow-up interview.

**Are there any potential risks involved?**
The interview, except the signed consent form, will be immediately anonymised. The data will be named and organised using a numbering system to maintain your confidentiality. I will use a key to analyse the data - this will be located in a password protected excel sheet. Only myself, the sole researcher, will have access to the data.

You should be aware that prior to any work beginning the project will go through the University's Ethical review and approval process as described in the Ethics Policy.

During the full lifecycle of this project, all data will be stored and backed up on Durham University's cloud-based system, One Drive. Backup is conducted regularly and automatically by the University's IT team. Additionally, all data will be stored on my personal laptop and backed up on my USB drive, both of which can only be accessed by myself, the sole researcher. The data files will be password protected to ensure your confidentiality and safety including sensitive data e.g. your personal identity, other personal details and politically sensitive information relating to the UK and US government. Metadata such as analysis of the interview data will be organised, located and backup up in the same manner.

I value greatly your participation in this study as your perspective and insights into Anglo-American relations post-9/11 will be crucial for the empirical and conceptual originality of my PhD thesis.

**Will my data be kept confidential?**
All information obtained during the study will be kept confidential. If the data is published it will be entirely anonymous and will not be attributed to you. If the researcher wishes to publish identifiable data, e.g. using direct quotes from interviews, your permission will be obtained.

Full details are included in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

**What will happen to the results of the project?**
The data will also be used in my PhD thesis which is due for submission in autumn 2023. All research data and records needed to validate the research findings will be stored for 10 years after publication of the PhD thesis, as 10 years is the standard under Durham University's data management policy.

Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its world-class research for public benefit. As part of this commitment the University has established an online repository for all Durham University Higher Degree theses which provides access to the full text of freely available theses. The study in which you are invited to participate will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in

print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published open access.

**Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this study?**
If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or their supervisor. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please submit a complaint via the University's Complaints Process.

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.

Privacy Notice

Durham University

## Appendix B. Privacy Notice

This section of the Privacy Notice provides you with the privacy information that you need to know before you provide personal data to the University for the particular purpose(s) stated below.

**Project Title:** Influence without Leverage? Anglo-American Relations and the Middle East Post-9/11

**Type(s) of personal data collected and held by the researcher and method of collection:**

Two types of data will be collected in this study. Interview data will be generated, firstly in the form of audio recordings, and secondly in the form of interview transcriptions of those recordings. The duration of the interviews will vary, running anywhere from 30 minutes up to 2 hours.

**How personal data is stored:**

After the interview your data will be immediately anonymised. The data will be named and organised using a numbering system to maintain participants' confidentiality. A key will be used to analyse the data, and this will be located in a password protected excel sheet. Only Rachel Moreland, the sole researcher, will have access to the password and the excel file itself.

During the full lifecycle of this project, all data will be stored and backed up on Durham University's One Drive. Backup is conducted regularly and automatically by the University's IT team. Additionally, all data will be stored on my personal laptop and backed up on my USB drive, both of which can only be accessed by the sole researcher, Rachel Moreland. The data files will be password protected to ensure anonymity and the safety of research participants, including sensitive data e.g. participants' identities, other personal details and politically sensitive information relating to the UK and US government. Metadata such as analysis of the interview data will be organised, located and backup up in the same manner.

Withdrawal of data

Your participation is voluntary, and you do not have to agree to take part. If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

**Who the researcher shares personal data with:**

There are no other partners outside of Durham University with whom the data will be shared. The sole researcher, Rachel Moreland, will share excerpts of anonymous data with project supervisors (within Durham), and this will be done securely using Durham University emails or during in person meetings. Additionally, supervisors will have indirect access to the data through reading and discussing of the project.

Please be aware that if you disclose information which indicates the potential for serious and immediate harm to yourself or others, the research team may be obliged to breach confidentiality and report this to relevant authorities. This includes disclosure of child protection offences such as the physical or sexual abuse of minors, the physical abuse of vulnerable adults, money laundering, or other crimes covered by prevention of terrorism legislation. Where you disclose behaviour (by yourself or others) that is potentially illegal but does not present serious and immediate danger to others, the researcher will, where appropriate, signpost you to relevant services, but the information you provide will be kept confidential (unless you explicitly request otherwise).

**How long personal data is held by the researcher:**

Your data will be used in the researcher's PhD thesis which is due for submission in 2023. As such, the data will be archived for 10 years per the University's Data Management Plan.

Upon completion of the project, the audio recordings and full interview transcriptions will be destroyed. Transcribed interview data will be stored backed up on my personal laptop and a USB, both of which are password protected. The scanned signed consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet at my personal home address. Anonymised or non-sensitive research data will be deposited in the University's Research Data Repository.

**Further information:**

**Researcher:** Rachel Leigh Moreland

**Department:** School of Government and International Affairs

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Supervisor(s) name: Professor Clive Jones / Professor Anoush Ehteshami

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**Appendix C. Interview Consent Form**

**Project title**: Influence without Leverage? Anglo-American Relations and the Middle East Post-9/11

**Researcher(s)**: Rachel L. Moreland
**Department:** School of Government and International Affairs
**Contact details**: rachel.l.moreland@durham.ac.uk / +447582992700
**Supervisor name**: Professor Clive Jones
**Supervisor contact details:** c.a.jones@durham.ac.uk

This form is to confirm that you understand what the purposes of the project, what is involved and that you are happy to take part. Please initial each box to indicate your agreement:

| | |
|---|---|
| I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet and the privacy notice for the above project. | |
| I have had sufficient time to consider the information and ask any questions I might have. I am satisfied with the answers I have been given. | |
| I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project. | |
| I agree to participate in the above project. | |
| I consent to being audio recorded and understand how recordings will be used in the research output. | |
| I consent to the researcher collecting and processing 'special category data' (e.g. political opinions) as defined by data protection legislation. | |
| I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. | |
| I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports and other research outputs.<br>Please choose one of the following two options:<br>o EITHER I agree to my real name being used in the above<br>o OR I do not agree to my real name being used in the above | |

| |
|---|
| Participant's Signature_______________________________ Date______________ |

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)____________________________________________

Researcher's Signature______________________ Date______________

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)_____________________________________________

**Appendix D. Sample Interview Questions**

1. Please confirm your name and where are you from?
2. Could you outline your role in the UK government/military **OR** US government/military? (pick one)
3. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase 'special relationship'?
4. How, if at all, do you think the power dynamics between the UK and USA changed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks?
5. Why do you think the UK prioritised standing 'shoulder to shoulder' with the US in Iraq and Afghanistan?
6. Following the attacks on the twin towers, what did you think would be the outcome of Anglo-American military intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003?
7. How did Britain's close alliance with the US in Afghanistan/Iraq/Libya/Syria help serve British interests? **OR** How did American's close alliance with the UK in Afghanistan/Iraq/Libya/Syria help serve American interests? (pick one_
    a. What is your understanding of British/American interests? (pick one)
8. The UK and the US approached to the so-called 'war on terror' differently from a legal standpoint. The UK adopted a more criminal justice approach to terrorism to be addressed by the rule of law. The US adopted a more militarised approach to conducting counter-terrorism operations. Were these differing approaches value driven or politically driven?
9. Several UK government reports questioned the US' treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay and Bagram. Can you reflect upon how the British government tried to influence the US government to ensure that its treatment of detainees was in accordance with international law?
10. How important was it for the Blair government to engage the US in the Middle East Peace Process in order to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict?
11. After 9/11, the Bush administration revised its National Security Strategy to emphasise the primacy of American power and pre-emptive self-defence. How did the US' new strategy impact upon Anglo-American relations?
12. To what extent was nation-building a key strategic objective of US policy in Afghanistan and Iraq? **OR** To what extent was nation-building a key strategic objective of UK policy in Afghanistan and Iraq? (pick one)
    a. Can you reflect upon how and why the UK and USA agreed and disagreed over the importance of nation-building and reconstruction efforts?
13. Do you think the UK government demonstrated greater leadership in the Libya and Syria conflicts compared to the previous two military interventions in the Middle East and if so why?
14. How would you describe the relationship between the Cameron and Obama governments during the Syria conflict?
    a. Why do you think Prime Minister David Cameron had to initially convince President Obama to intervene in Libya?
15. What interests and values do you think defined Anglo-American relations during the Afghanistan and Iraq wars?
    a. How does that compare to the Libya and Syria conflicts?

16. How do you think that the US' lack of urgency to intervene in Syria impacted its relationship with the UK?
    a. President Obama stated that the US would intervene in Syria if the Assad regime crossed the 'red line' and used chemical weapons against his own people. Why do you think the US and UK responded differently to this issue?
17. To what degree did the US consider its relationship with the UK to be 'special' with regards to Anglo-American intervention in the Middle East post-9/11? **OR** To what degree did the UK consider its relationship with the US to be 'special' with regards to Anglo-American intervention in the Middle East post-9/11? (pick one)

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